VOL. 04

Pink pages

India's National Lesbian and Gay Magazine

June '10

Pride Special

PHOTOGRAPHING PRIDE

Charles and Sarah's ambitious global Gay Pride project on its way to India!

REVATHI'S STORY

Trans-cending the South Indian LGBT community

OUT @ CAMPUS

India's openly gay academicians

Coming out of the Indian Lesbian · Pink Yatras in Nepal · The hottest bisexual celebrities · Quarantine's first day on the stands

Anniversary Issue

www.pink-pages.co.in

Editor in Chief: Udayan, Bangalore

Associate Editor: Tushar M, Manipal

Creative Direction & Graphics: Gaurav, Bhopal, Chinmay Sathe, Pune

Cover Design: Yadhu Gopalakrishnan, Mysore

Contributors

Ananya Dhote, Delhi
Harish Iyer, Mumbai
Diepiriye Kuku, Delhi
Priya Ganoo, Mumbai
Sourendra Kumar Das, Mumbai
Arijit Singh, Kanpur
Vikram Tyagi, Delhi
Ratnesh, Bangalore
Atul, Indore
Kishore Kumar, Pune
Karan Sood, Bhopal
Ashish, Manipal
Prachi, Bangalore
Akil, Bangalore
Niket, Kolkata
Gandhi, Delhi
Tabitha T, Mumbai
Shiva Prasad, Hyderabad

Editorial: **editor@pink-pages.co.in**

Editor in Chief: **udayan@pink-pages.co.in**

Associate Editor: **tushar@pink-pages.co.in**

Advertisements: **advertisement@pink-pages.co.in**

Contents | issue 4

1 *From the Editor's desk*

2 *Letters to the Editor*

Features

Cover Story

4 *Out at Campus: India's openly gay academicians*

9 *Gay Pride 2010 Special*

Politics & Activism

11 *The Advocate : Arvind Narain*

13 *The Story of Revathi*

Profiles

15 *Pink Pages are often not so pink, they are red!*

17 *For Love and everything Else- The story of PlanetRomeo.com*

Science

21 *The Gender Conundrum*

Relationships

22 *The curse of Virgin Love*

23 *Are you in an abusive relationship?*

The Gay Agenda

24 *Truth is the stranger, not fiction*

26 *'Today I was fired for being a faggot...'*

28 *Me Lord, I object !*

Personals

30 *Ashamed to be a Lesbian? No more!*

31 *The world of Tabiness*

Contents | issue 4

Travel

33 *Pink Yatras in Nepal*

Fashion 'n Lifestyle

37 *Head to toe looks this season!*
41 *Food and Drink*
43 *Fitness*
44 *Interiors Today*
47 *Gaytech's Gadgets*

Culture Curry

Books

49 *Quarantine, Rubyfruit Jungle, Tales from the City & More tales from the City*

Literature

51 *The Wise old man of Indian gay Literature*
52 *Out of Quarantine: Rahul Mehta*

Cinema

53 *The World Unseen, A Single Man, Show me love, Bomgay, Shortbus*

Arts

56 *Photographing Pride, worldwide!*

Entertainment

60 *Bi the way, I'm a Celebrity!*

Regulars

64 *Regional News, International News*
67 *Ask Peer Queer !*
68 *Cartoons*
70 *Queer 'n Funny!*
71 *From the Blogosphere*
72 *Happenings*
73 *Helplines*

PiNK pages

From the editor's desk

The Professor Siras tragedy has pained us all immensely and rightly so. Here's a dedicated teacher subjected to not only a breach of his privacy, but also the worst form of homophobic discrimination. But what pains me equally is the response it generated- firstly from the media, that shamelessly lay bare the man's most intimate moments and secondly, the gay media that transformed him into an icon for gays nationally. Really, a gay icon? A man who considers his same-sex relationships a matter of shame for himself and his family! If anything, for an openly gay man like me, it's his response that was the real shame. And while gay advocates pushed him oh-so-unwillingly into a legal tangle, the man himself seemed drained of all energy to carry forward his great "fight" for gay rights!

So what are the shortcomings of our community that this whole fiasco bares? Firstly, the need for an integrated national gay rights organization like the Human Rights Campaign in the United States. Motley informal groups might have worked till now, but if we are to take our movement beyond the intellectual confines of Mumbai or Bangalore to a scale that is really required in this country, we do need a national platform, and for that an effective national leadership is of paramount importance. But can the present gay "leadership" in this country that seems to be hopelessly stuck up in a time warp of the 1990s deliver what is really needed? No student support initiatives, no platforms for families with gay children, no sign of a national gay rights group. Why does the movement in India seem so rudderless? What they seemed contended with offering is a tacky wedding band at a Pride parade that hardly saw any increase in numbers. A wedding band, really?

"Often we tend to hide our own shortcomings in the garb of alleged-homophobia. If I'm indispensable to the company I'm working for, no boss would ever fire me. Being honest about ourselves, contrary to popular perception, actually works to our advantage."

Secondly, we have to loosen up ourselves. We've got to know when to cry homophobia and when not to. No matter where we are working, it's our work that matters at the end of the day. Often we tend to hide our own shortcomings in the garb of alleged-homophobia. If I'm indispensible to the company I'm working for, no boss would ever fire me. Being honest about ourselves, contrary to popular perception, actually works to our advantage. A confident and irreproachable gay person who knows the work he's doing and gets along well with his co-workers is less likely to be fired than a person who's furtively homosexual and a social imbecile.

In this issue we also turn our attention to a matter so often brushed under the carpet in Indian society- that of child sexual abuse. The scale of abuse, according to a national study, is far worse than anybody had thought. It reports that 69 per cent of all Indian children are victims of physical, mental or emotional abuse, with New Delhi's children facing an astounding abuse rate of 83.12 percent. Overall, Indian children were found to be victims of a slew of sexual crimes -- rape, sodomy, exposure to pornographic material, fondling, forcible kissing and sexual advances, among others. In the pages to follow Sourendra recounts the very personal story of Harish, whose childhood ordeal stirred his conscience that helped him speak out on an issue that's rarely touched in public. There's a lot that we as a community as well as individuals can do to prevent more children from falling victim to such horrors. Education and sensitivity are the most important among them, and for that to happen we need a dialogue on this issue, which is sadly still lacking despite the laudable efforts of men like Harish.

Lastly, not to forget, it's gay pride month- the time to be gay about who we are. The parades are not happening this month in all our cities, but if you're in one those those places where's it's still on, don't just sit at home, watching the colorful parades on your television screens. Instead, grab your rainbow flag and celebrate diversity on the streets of your city with the rest of us all!

Udayan

Editor-in-Chief

Letters to the editor can be addressed to: editor@pink-pages.co.in

"Gay in the City"

I probably will offer Gay in the City Pink Pages to almost everyone who I am familiar with. Superb Job.

-Juan Drugan

Great article…well written and informative!

-Dhee

A few things about the Pune segment: "This meticulous process is designed to, as Apphia says, keep out the homophobes." (No one has asked me about it… and its definitely not a quote I've given)

"A quarterly journal called 'Jiah' is brought out from different cities in the country, centred in Pune. It deals with lesbian-related issues." Jiah is not limited to lesbian related issues only. Please get familiar with the magazine before gay washing it. Jiah is a magazine for QUEER Indian women, everywhere.. It is a magazine for Bisexuals, transpeople, straight family along with the lesbians. Also, Zavoos' is actually Zamu's!

-Apphia Kumar

Kishore replies:

Dear Apphia,

Though I'm pretty sure that I haven't written a word from without our telephonic conversation, I beg forgiveness for "gay washing" Jiah. We all need to overcome our biases, don't we!

Thanks for correcting the spelling.
Pleasure doing business with you.

Love,
Kishore.

"Pink Tweets"

Good one! Not everyone have the guts to express about themselves freely in today's world. It is essential but it's not possible with everyone and Pink Pages is one source to step towards this freedom. I wish all the best…'

-Roopa

The idea of inclusion should be weaved culturally. Until that happens, odds have to be faced. But I don't think people who already support, can be swayed by homophobic thoughts

-Krithika

"Udayan Unbarred: My Homosexual Agenda"

Great work Udayan… You deserve a special applaud for your nomenclatures. In my opinion, the most dangerous are the "homosexual hypocrites". While your article is a reply to your critics nevertheless it highlights the flaws within the community. I couldn't agree with you more. Enlightening insiders is more important. In our country where the community conscience in people is dismal it's never a surprise to face lame opposition from insiders who are the real roadblocks in making progress. Most of these people are happy as long as there is party and sex around. The worry should be that threat is never as lethal from outsiders as it is from insiders. History is witness… it makes one wonder how could India be ruled by British for four centuries but for the "support" of Indians!

When we need to be proactive and cut down the struggle time to get the "equal citizenship" status that countries like Americas to had put in by not repeating their mistakes these hypocrites need special attention… as far as your reply to your "critics" is concerned just reminds me what Bertrand Russell said "Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric"… keep going!

-Rohan

On Professor Siras

I felt an intense sadness on reading this story, yet I'm also positive that as the story of LGBT India unfolds, Professor R

Siras will be remembered as an early martyr who died, hopefully to give life and hope to future gays and lesbians.

The Professor should be remembered on his skills as a teacher, and measured thus too. I wonder if there's one of his students who would remember his teaching ability and write up about it. Failing that, I'd think there must be something written concerning his work which we outside that circuit could read.

-Anbey

Gay rights and politics in the US and UK

The problem with this country is BOTH the Democrats and Republicans. Anyone who seriously thinks that one side isn't corrupt or slaves to Corporate America hasn't done an

adequate job of paying attention. To the Republicans: The GW administration will go down in History as one of the worst administrations. They eroded your constitutional rights, expanded the power of the wealthy elite, invaded countries under false pretenses, destroyed diplomatic relations with the rest of the world, and spent money like it was going out of style. To the Democrats: Obama is a dud. He promised much and has turned out to be another corporate lackey. He made deals with big pharma to ensure you could not get your medication cheaper elsewhere, he flip flopped on military tribunals, he refuses to fix health care properly through nationalization or single payer, he populates his inner circle with more Wall Street insiders, he spends money on bailouts and useless stimulus packages.

-Ted

I'm in the US Army and I have to say the words and discussions I have seen about the military are completely disgusting. I have just one thing to say to them- The way you talk about the people who serve YOUR country, the people who put THEIR live on the line, they are doing it for people like you. Some of you have no appreciation to these people who don't even know who you are but are willing to give up family, friends, loved ones, and their own lives so that you can see another day in peace in this country. Instead of talking down about homosexuals, why don't you see all that they are giving you? They are giving you their LIVES. And in return this is what you give them? A life of secrecy and self denial to make you people happy?! Get over yourselves! This is so selfish when they are doing something 100% selfless, this just goes to show that gays in the military have a lot more balls than many of you do here. Why don't you go over to the sand box live their life for once?

-Fanelle

My perception of what helped to tilt the scales was the homophobic hate campaign which 'The Sun' newspaper (UK) and its editor Kelvin Mackenzie carried out against the singer Elton John "Let's all go for this pooftah and finish him off once and for all" was what he said to his editorial staff. The paper has a huge readership in the UK. The campaign went ahead and Elton was outed and shamed in a hateful manner, and the editor sat back and rubbed his hands with glee to watch the abasement of the singer.

But one thing he had not bargained for: homophobic as the readership was, nearly everyone was familiar with his heart-felt songs and loved them, their variety depth of feeling and soulfulness. I dare say even young homophobes had grown up from infanthood with these songs humming in their bones. They may, on the whole, be uncomfortable with gayness but a good song was a good song they were not prepared to change their view, unable to toggle their perception from good to bad, unwilling to throw away an essential part of their being in order to concur with mass opinion. Furthermore, heck, they LIKED Elton John. Demonstrations followed where countrywide, people publicly burned their copies of 'The Sun', and this was followed by a boycott of the paper. Dismayed at the loss of readership and revenue, The Sun had to back track, and an apology in large letters had to be delivered across the front page of the paper. It was a moment of triumph, and the way I remember things, it was about from that time that perceptions had to change. Change they did, and a long time it was in coming too.

Indian sentiments can be highly volatile, and some of us here in UK feel (and hope) that when change comes, it could come with great rapidity. Time will tell.

-John Champneys

The Symposium

This article re-affirms my faith in a lot of things that I believe in. Well, the first thing I am obviously going to do is to grab this book from Landmark, Bangalore. Kishore, thanks a million for this nice article and an even nicer review!

-Digantha B.G.

London Dreams

Fascinating! Hey.. It's a funny thing, I'm in England and know hardly anything about the London Scene. I'll need Pink Pages India to be my guide I reckon…

-John Champneys

ERRATA The Gadgets section in the previous issue was written by Gandhi. The omission is regretted.

COVER STORY

Dr Sreenivas Siras, a Marathi professor at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) sacked for being gay, was found dead on April 7, 2010. Siras, 64, was suspended by the conservative institution after a secretly shot videotape surfaced, showing him having sex with a rickshaw puller. On appeal, the Allahabad High Court had stayed the suspension and ordered his reinstatement. "Now, I can go back to my beloved university," Siras had said to NDTV, after the court ordered AMU to not just take him back, but provide him accommodation till he retires later this year. Days later, he allegedly committed suicide.

Tushar M, in view of the recent controversy and subsequent 'suicide' of Dr. S.R. Siras, conducts an interview of various openly gay professors and academicians across India to know about their views and how difficult it is to be out in the academia.

We talk to three eminent openly gay academicians across India about the controversy, about what it means to be open about their sexuality, it's repercussions, and about their coming out experiences.

In conversation with Dr. Ashley Tellis from IIT Hyderabad, Dr. R. Raj Rao from Pune University, and Prof. Shivji Panikkar, MS University, Baroda

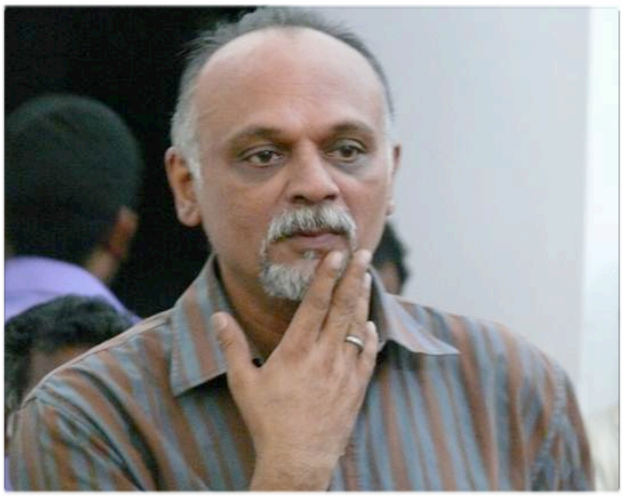
PP: Your immediate reaction to the whole Dr. Siras controversy?

Rao: Obviously it's very unfortunate, what happened. It should never have. There are many things about the entire episode that continue to puzzle me. I mean, whoever installed those hidden cameras in the professor's house, how did they enter the flat without his knowledge? People who live alone tend to be especially on their guard. Did Dr. Siras know the guys who sneaked into his house before hand? Then of course, his sudden death remains a conundrum. It's only when a thorough inquiry into all this is conducted, that the answers to these rankling questions will be known.

Panikkar: All through the events related to Dr. Siras my reaction was of absolute shock, disgust and disbelief. But such things do happen, right? Despite the repealing of IPC 377 by the Delhi High Court, the ground level commonsensical perceptions, antagonisms and the general structurally ingrained homophobia remains strongly in our society. It may take centuries of consorted efforts for that to go.
I see such events also as a backlash to the recent repealing of IPC 377 by the Delhi High Court. It is precisely at this point that the conservative sections of the society would try to take out the antagonisms on us more severely. In a country where getting legal justice is a very slow process, the other centers of authority and power in people's lives - like the university administrative system, media and even police would capitalize on such time lag and corner and victimize vulnerable individuals like Dr. Siras. The crux of the matter is the violation of privacy of an individual and that it was not a by-chance or an accidental event, it was a schemed and pre-planned violation and victimization. This is a terrifying situation to imagine. How far and to what extend the reactionary forces can go in victimizing individuals is a matter that would worry me for a long time.

Tellis: The Siras case is in many ways a watershed moment in Indian LGBT history, which we must analyse closely and learn from. To my mind, there are three major culprits in the case: the AMU establishment, the media and the so-called 'queer movement.'

The AMU establishment gunned for this man for two reasons: one to take revenge as Siras was part of the movement on that campus to hold the corrupt VC accountable and two to deflect from the real issue on the campus which is the VC's corruption. The real issue is



"The crux of the matter is the violation of privacy of an individual and that it was not a by-chance or an accidental event, it was a schemed and pre-planned violation and victimization." – ***Shivji Panikkar***

the corrupt VC, the fact that Siras had countered his corruption in the past, stood up to him and that this was payback time. This becomes clear if we ask a few questions: how is it that AMU discovered Siras' homosexuality and the fact that he picked up rikshawallas only when there is one year to his retirement and when he has been there for decades? Who were these newspersons? How did the footage land on the VC's table? This VC must be removed from his post immediately for instituting an unconstitutional and vicious with-hunt against Siras. Siras' RTI against him must be made public. All records on him must be made public. The media has shown the hypocrites they are in concentrating on Siras' sex life, parading it on national television, not even blocking his face out with no thought for the repercussions on this man's life. They did not even mention the structural issues of corruption in AMU and this VC, let alone reflect on the ethics of their own practices. The 'queer movement' rushes in, gets a reluctant Siras to file a case, does a fact-finding and leaves. To me, this is as insensitive as the earlier two invasions. As is clear from all the interviews and coverage, Siras was not 'gay' in the conventional sense of what that word means. He was 'outed' as homosexual by this VC and his offensive invasion of Siras' privacy. The media's abetting of this humiliation by beaming Siras across the country rendered him even more vulnerable. He stated AMU and his family as being his support systems. One had already betrayed him; the other in all probability was going to as well. He goes home, the Allahabad High Court stays his suspension and at the moment of his legal triumph, he is found dead. We still know nothing about what caused it. Whatever the facts of what happened, to my mind the queer movement should have been there with him when he went home, asked him and respected what he wanted right through, instead of simply marshalling him to a cause, a cause he clearly did not see as his own.

PP: What did you think of Dr. Siras's reaction to the whole issue?

Rao: I am told he was in a state of shock and confusion when the story broke. Perhaps he never expected such a thing to happen in his fiercest dreams. Anyone in his place would have become a sort of nervous wreck. What beats me, however, is that when he got a lawyer like Anand Grover to fight his case, and when the Allahabad High Court delivered a judgment in his favor, causing AMU to revoke his suspension, why then did he commit suicide--if suicide it was? Was someone threatening and blackmailing him? As I said, we shall never know the answers to these questions unless a full investigation into the matter is conducted, which seems unlikely.

Panikkar: One can just imagine what the hell the man must have gone through. The fear of social disgrace and ostracism, and the latent homophobia and its disabling effect in the victim must have been absolutely numbing. That the world should not know this must have been his first reaction and the main concern. But then, the University authorities had ulterior motive of suspending him from the job while getting the whole event orchestrated. By the time he got the suspension notice it was already a bit too late for him to have taken pro-active steps.

Sadly political activism and empowerment is the last priority for many academics, and if Dr. Siras was an activist, I believe this would not have happened, at least the way it has happened - so crude, cruel and direct the assault had been. In my experience if one tries to cover up and live, people will hound you all the more. That is why I wish that all gay people working in institutions or otherwise, be pro-active within their institutional/work spaces. More-over for self protection we need to consciously build-up supportive net-works of friends. Further, as university teachers we should be able to discuss queer issues in the class rooms, if needed make changes in the syllabus and introduce new courses based on queer studies, particularly in the field of humanities and social sciences. Gay people of all classes and professions should make an effort to express their sexual preferences and identity in open and remain in touch with the community, which more than anything will provide them the much needed empowerment. I do think that Dr. Siras got flustered and terribly confused initially and understandably so, when he should have

called out for help from the world of activism, which unfortunately he didn't do for a while at least.

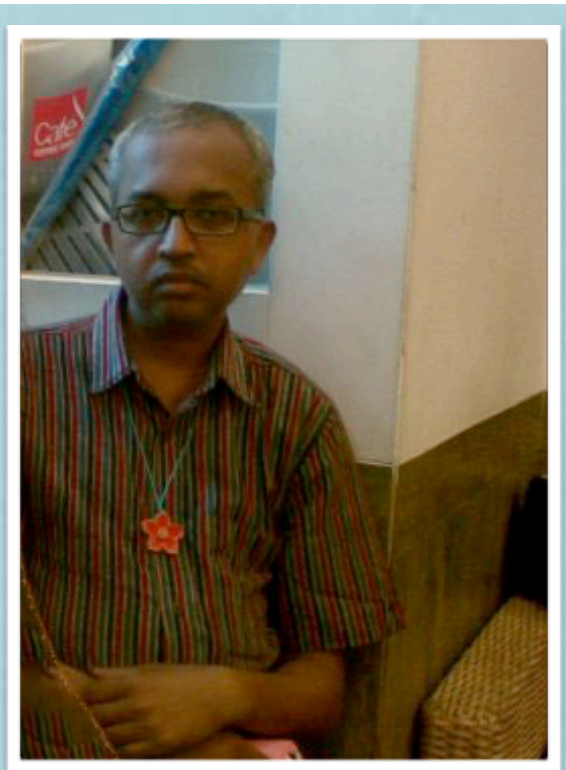
Tellis: This is precisely what I have been building up to in my first answer. Siras was homosexual, not gay and certainly not a gay activist. The classic illustration of this is the Barkha Dutt-Siras encounter when the story just broke. She was full of liberal, righteous rage and he answered in monosyllables that simply did not rise to the bait of her questions, probably did not even comprehend them. He spoke of people forgetting his homosexuality soon, he spoke of being ashamed, he spoke of loving AMU and feeling sad that they had rejected him. He was packing his bags, he did not think of protest. Now all of this might seem deeply objectionable and annoying to us, but if we are really supportive of homosexual subjects in this country, then we have to respect this man for who he was and wanted to be. Support has to be offered on the terms of the subject, not on the terms of the activist. I feel that the activists should have been with him throughout, gone home with him, had sustained interaction with him and seen what he wanted.

PP: What has been your experience and what were/ are the difficulties being an openly gay academician in India?

Rao: I have no coming out story. My entire body of work is my coming out story. As for being an openly gay academic in India, please refer to Georgina Maddox's piece entitled "Not AMU Alone" on the op-ed page of Indian Express dated 15 April 2010. Unlike many others, I'm afraid I can't really say I've been persecuted or harassed or victimised in 22 years of teaching in an Indian university. I've conducted an international queer conference in my department in 2007, and since that year, I run a course on LGBT Writing in India, which is well-subscribed. I firmly believe that the world looks to us gay people for cues as to how to deal with us (since they have no clue), and it is up to us to give out the right or wrong signals and vibes. If the signals and the vibes are right, one can survive without much hassle, even enjoy a measure of happiness. One does not have to wear one's sexuality on one's sleeve, as some queer people tend to do. At the same time, being closeted is bad. Dr. Siras was gullible and vulnerable because he was in the closet. Mainstream society is a monster. The meek and the weak are its obvious prey. But if one is able to bare one's chest (and one's fangs) and stand up to society, it automatically withdraws and leaves you alone.

Tellis: It is bloody difficult being an out gay teacher in India. I have faced incredibly hostile institutional reactions and had my career damaged because of it. I began my teaching career right after my MA in 1991 in Bombay University (I was barely 21). Teachers were using students as spies, checking their notebooks for what I taught and claiming students were upset and complaining. I quit the temporary post within the semester. It was the first taste of what was to be life-long homophobic harassment.

When I did an interview with Venkateswara College for an ad hoc job, for example, I was not given the post because I was homosexual. I know this because one of the experts on the panel informed me of this later. When



"Siras was homosexual, not gay and certainly not a gay activist. The classic illustration of this is the Barkha Dutt-Siras encounter when the story just broke. She was full of liberal, righteous rage and he answered in monosyllables that simply did not rise to the bait of her questions, probably did not even comprehend them." **- Ashley Tellis**

this expert asked what connection my homosexuality had with the job at hand and my qualifications for it, there was no answer. These were minority religion institutions and got away with what they like and were part of a joint campaign against me where the only thing they could use against me was my homosexuality.

I then got a job with Kirorimal College where I was involved with a Gender group in college called Parivartan and a University-wide group called Forum Against Sexual Harassment (FASH) which was

instrumental in formulating Delhi University's belated sexual harasment policy. As a punishment, professors told a student of mine who had poor attendance that she would get to sit for the exam if she filed a sexual harassment complaint against me. So, not only was I gay, I was also harassing women students. Clearly, I am a man of many talents! They expected me to feel terribly ashamed about this complaint and expected to have taught me a lesson, but I thought this was a perfect moment to put the policy into action and so I demanded a copy of the complaint and the setting up of a committee. To date, I have not got a copy of the complaint.

This is part of the problem with DU and University-based harassment histories. There is no documentation, no taking of issues forward, no sustained engagement, and institutional memory is very short in these matters. To them, it is all a big joke. Some teachers would send effeminate male teachers to Parivartan meetings saying we had called them, to prove that they were napunsak and needed to do gender stuff. This is the attitude toward gender issues on campus.

There is something about the homosexual that allows people to spread whatever stories they like about him and everyone believes them. The stories I have heard about myself coming to me from so-called well-wishers who heard them makes me feel like I do not know myself at all. I am supposed to have had rave-parties-turned-orgies in my rooms at St. Stephen's, stood outside schools in Delhi waiting to prey on little boys, supplied women students to Jat hostelites in exchange for blowjobs, I could fill a scintillating novel with these stories. Alas, I am just a boring fool who does not drink, smoke, do substances and hates parties and children. But my alter ego is quite a star. David Halperin makes this point in his book Saint Foucault which talks about his own harassment at MIT. No matter what you do or not do, stories are going to spread. Heteros can do what they like. They have affairs with their students, marry their students, but all that is okay, because heterosexuality is okay. But if a gay man so much as sneezes, it is an epidemic.

Panikkar: There is no end to coming out; it is an ever reckoning process for me. In other words to see one's truth and telling it to the world is a continuous process. Each time one speaks through a painting or writing a story or an article or giving an interview like this surely are enabling acts. This is important to do because we are constantly warned from conservative quarters to maintain secrecy for whatever reasons. Silence was imposed on me all through my growing-up years. There was fear, guilt and shame associated with the feelings I had towards men, and relationships I shared with them. In the 1970s through the larger part of 1980s there was a great sense of bewilderment, dishonesty and confusion. Groping through all those one also committed blunders and irreversibly wronged ones' self and others. My coming out in public was partly circumstantial (like the break-up of the marriage), partly through confessions in intimate friendships and partly self willed. But, mostly and throughout I tried to maintain discretion, considering the appropriateness and the feelings of concerned others. It is only in the past ten years or so that I am able to truly realize and accept what I am.

As an academician I always believed in maintaining intellectual honesty and integrity in what I did. So, it was in the academic spaces that I became what I am and so it is there that I began to open-up, including exploring my interest in cultural expressions of sexual minorities. In a short a while I began living an open gay life too. But, it was not always easy to know or clear as to what actually my colleagues and students are pr were thinking and talking (gossiping?) about me, and in any case I had not been bothered about that either.
Frankly it had not been very difficult for me to live the day to day of a gay person. But, at specific situations I have definitely experienced structurally latent homophobia and discrimination. For instance I was kept out of a sexual harassment enquiry committee on the basis that I am gay. But then I always confronted these and have asserted my resistance to such attitudes, sometimes I was successful but at times I was not. But, in general I do not want to judge the situation for gay academicians all over India on the basis of my experiences; I suppose there would be considerable differences depending on various factors.

PP: How you would have reacted had you been faced with a similar situation?

Panikkar: Faced with such a gross violation of privacy, I would have immediately filed an FIR in the nearest police station and would have rushed to the media and to the activist circles for support and assistance. We should always remember that for an out of closet gay person there is very little to loose – to accept what one is in public empowers you, gives you freedom and self-confidence. I believe that resisting attempts at victimization and defending oneself from violations is equally important as being pro-active.

Tellis: Mine would have been a very different story as I am a proud and out gay person; I am a gay activist, I

would have dragged AMU to court on the first day and done much else. But that is really the issue here. The point is that Siras was not gay and if the 'queer movement' really wants to engage with Indian same-sex subjects, then they have to understand the sociological particularities of these subjects rather than just steamroller them with universalizing, empty categories of rights and identity.

"Unlike Dr. Siras, who won everyone's sympathy, I have many detractors within the queer community itself, who do not see eye to eye with me because of ideological differences. My kind of queerness is subversive in the extreme, which many people dislike." ***– Raj Rao***

Rao: I would have been livid. But I wouldn't have let it get me. I would fight tooth and nail to get justice. Perhaps I would have to fight alone. Unlike Dr. Siras, who won everyone's sympathy, I have many detractors within the queer community itself, who do not see eye to eye with me because of ideological differences. My kind of queerness is subversive in the extreme, which many people dislike. I believe Dr. Siras made certain mistakes. For one thing, he should never have lived on campus. This is a decision that academics like me or Dr Hoshang Merchant made early in our careers. If Dr. Siras were in his own flat, would a so-called sting operation of this kind make any sense?

PP: Prof Panikkar, you openly supported your students in 2007 when they made paintings considered 'obscene' by the right wing, and were not just suspended from your post but also physically attacked by the Sangh Parivar's 'moral police' soon after. How did you handle all that?

Panikkar: Curiously, the 2007 painting controversy at the MS University outwardly had nothing to do with my sexuality or personal life. But, in retrospect, I can see that whoever wanted to throw me out, and did what they had planned was primarily because of my non-conformist life and approach, and how it was making a difference within the educational institution. At that volatile point of crisis when I was compelled to go underground, I am told that the rightwing goons were continuously hounding around my flat, trying to also find out the whereabouts of my live-in partner. At the time of those actual physical attacks which I was subjected to, they were also using abusive language referring to my sexual identity.

The last three years, since my suspension, had been the worst period in my life, emotionally and academically because I am still deprived of even access to the library, archive and to the entire university campus. With a hind sight, I can say that I had been victimized for my differences, and it was all done in the pretext of not abiding to a university's administrative protocol.

PP: Dr Ashley, in your opinion will attitudes change if there are more out professors?

Tellis: There are very few our professors and the ones who come out face professional lives like mine. Who would want to come out in these circumstances? We just need safeguards, legal safeguards, against homophobia. I am not interested in heterosexuals accepting me. I'd rather be dead than accepted by heterosexuals, who are the sickest, most hypocritical people in the world. But I simply will not let them get away with their hush-hush, closed door homophobia. The fact is that in DU I could do nothing about it. Legally, I had no ground to stand on. Even the so-called historic judgement of the Delhi High Court last year can do nothing about structural homophobia in institutions. 377 has not gone entirely anyway outside of consensual gay sex in bourgeois bedrooms and that too bedrooms only in Delhi. Siras' bedroom in Aligarh is a free zone for all.

What we need are legal safeguards in Universities that protect sexual minorities. This can only happen if the University recognizes sexual minorities as categories in their universe. Right now we are not even legible to them as subjects, though through informal means they can harass us, suspend us, throw us out of jobs, do what they like; use the probation period to throw gay faculty out as has just happened to me. This is the wonderful homophobic, sexist, anti-feminist and oppressive world of Indian education.

PRIDE 2010

Gay Pride 2010 Special

It's that time of the year again to throw back all inhibitions and fly with panache the rainbow flag! As gay pride spreads to more cities of India, it's the young who're the outest and proudest of them all. So what do they think of gay pride? What does it mean to their lives? Here's what some of you said.

Gaurav Pramanik, Mumbai

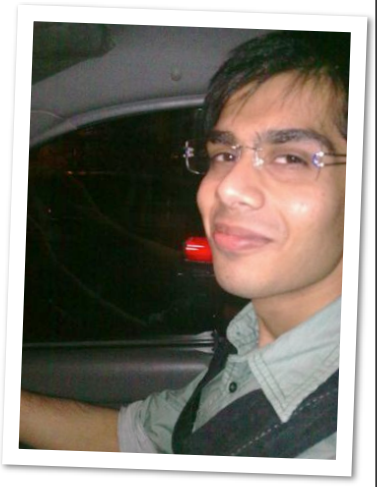
Pride to me would rightly mean the antonym of "shame"... It's an exhilarating way to show that we aren't ashamed of what we are. Pride to me means a lot in many ways, because that's one day I can unabashedly walk down the streets and not having to whimper about my orientation.

Shruti,

Washington D.C./Delhi

Pride is... an affirmation of our different sexual orientations and gender expressions and identities. An affirmation that our differences make us special, not deviant. Pride, to me, is also a community, a network. I wouldn't be where I am NOW, or wherever I will be in 10 years, if it were not for all the LGBT individuals in my life

Rahul Singh, Delhi



In simple words pride is to be the person you are.. Pride to hold your lover's hands in public, pride to break through from fake life.. a double faced life. Change in law is a milestone for the community but awareness in society is also needed.

Sharath, Bangalore

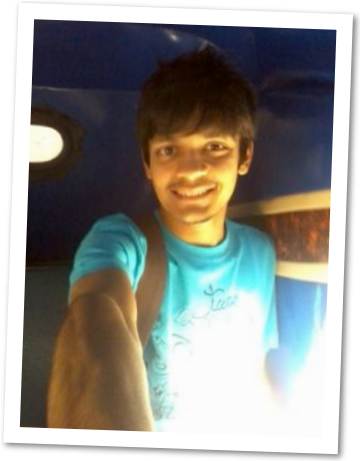
Pride to me is when I look back at the time, how I've evolved from a total scared stranger into a strong and confident biatch :P

Deepam Sinha, Bangalore

It's not just about one's expression of Identity or a contrast from the rest but it's more of a free Individuality! Pride is a feeling of Self-Discovery, Boost, Comfort with your own-self, Confidence development, acceptance & being happy about who you are! It's letting the world know that you are one among them and an indispensable link to the people, to all of us!

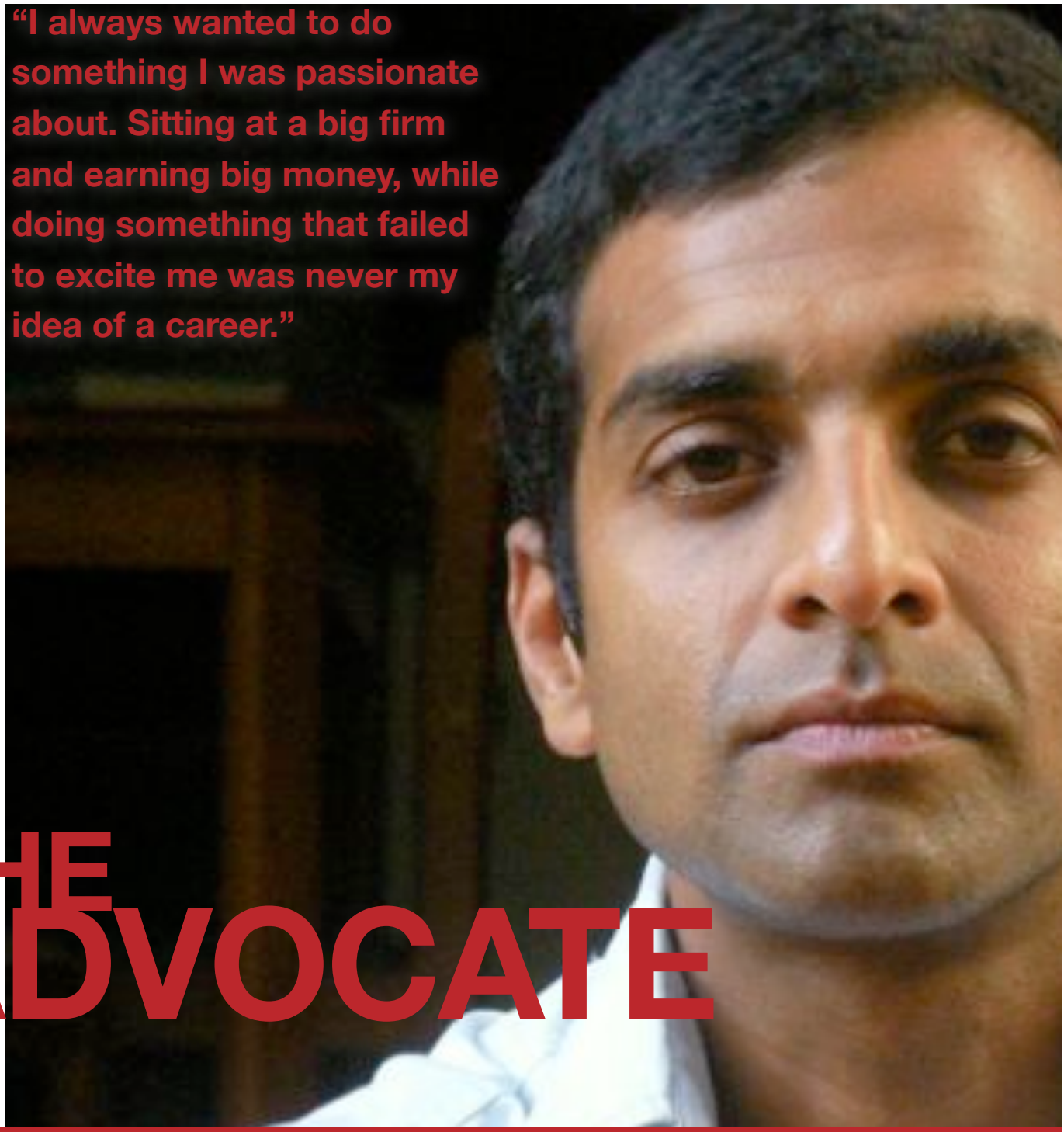
Prasenjit Das, Delhi

Pride to me means being myself. It means being comfortable the way I am, to be able to hold my head high. It also means to be able to unfurl all my colors and be proud of it!



Vishal, Mumbai

" To be what I am! "



"I always wanted to do something I was passionate about. Sitting at a big firm and earning big money, while doing something that failed to excite me was never my idea of a career."

THE ADVOCATE

Udayan *catches up with Arvind Narain, one of the most prominent faces behind the struggle against Section 377. He talks about the historic case and its implications, the nature of the Indian gay rights movement and his pet project- the Alternative Law Forum.*

Arvind Narain has been hailed by the Indian media as the country's most promising gay rights advocate. But the man himself- thirty five years old, with a petit build and an amazing humility for the stature he's carved for himself within the community and beyond, would not like to limit himself to just that. "I think of myself, foremost as a human rights activist, and gay rights is of course the closest to my heart", he says when I caught up with him at this year's Bangalore Queer film festival, where he was addressing a conference on the implications of the Section 377 judgment.

Arvind is a graduate of the National Law School of India, and given his natural brilliance at his job, while he could have easily gone for a lucrative career as a criminal lawyer he chose the more audacious path of human rights, eventually setting up the Alternative Law Forum in 2000 with a group of his close friends back from college. "I always wanted to do something I was passionate about. Sitting at a big firm and earning big money, while doing something that failed to excite me was never my idea of a career." And the Indian LGBT community can be thankful for that. Arvind was one of the key faces that drove the Delhi High Court to its historic decision to decriminalize homosexuality.

"We have 16 anti-gay petitions before the court and just two pro-gay ones. We desperately need more bodies to come forward with their own petitions."

"The very fact that today we're here discussing the repeal of Section 377 seems such a far cry from the first ever gay rights conference that we held back in 1997 when it was almost impossible to tell someone that you're gay". Arvind points out the most salient features of the beautifully worded 105 page judgment. "Firstly it talks about the right to intimacy, and how that is something that cannot be snatched away. So we're not just limiting the discussion to the old argument about what we do in our bedrooms is nobody's business. We're moving beyond the bedroom and acknowledging human emotions. Secondly, by quoting men like Nehru and Ambedkar, our community has been mainstreamed. And thirdly, the fact that sexual orientation has been declared as a ground on which there can be no discrimination is immensely significant."

However, as Arvind honestly points out, that it was both hard work and "great luck" combined that made the pro-gay ruling possible. "The bench comprised of judges who showed great sympathy, thanks to the fact that they'd been interacting through the Lawyer's Collective with two retired judges- one from Australia, another from South Africa- who've been at the forefront of legal gay rights campaigns in their respective countries. Arvind doubts if the Supreme Court challenge will be as simple. "We have 16 anti-gay petitions before the court and just two pro-gay ones. We desperately need more bodies to come forward with their own petitions. And therefore, he's appealing to teachers and parents of gay children to come forward and be a part of the Supreme Court challenge.

But given the lack of proper organizations and communication channels in India for the mentioned groups (such as the PFLAG in several western countries) getting them together is quite a challenge in itself. The need for national LGBT organizations has been painfully brought out by the Professor Siras case. An organization like the Lambda Legal for instance could have immediately taken up that open-and-shut case of blatant homophobia. Arvind agrees that national organizations like these are a "good idea" but doesn't feel any immediate need for them. "Frankly I don't care much as long as the work gets done. In bigger organizations, real work tends to be much slower thanks to beaurocratic lethargy. For example, during the Delhi High Court case, we were such a motley group of people from all over the country, but the work was smoothly executed at a very informal level." However, given India's vastness in terms of geography and demographics, it may not be the best way forward if we've to have a long term plan in mind. Arvind promptly agrees.

That's about the judgment and a lot has happened since then. Arvind feels that the most important of all those events is the conglomeration of homophobic forces in the country. "Such a disparate group of religious as well as secular groups have come together that one would be generally surprised to find them sharing the same platform."

Speaking of less legal and more social aspects, I asked him how he sees the two vis-a-vis each other. "I really don't see a conflict between the two in India, because honestly I've never faced any homophobic discrimination till now. I'm hopeful that gay rights is now going to make rapid progress in this country both in legal and social terms." Interestingly, Arvind has always thought of India's case to be different from that of western countries. In his book "Because we have a voice- Queer Politics in India" Arvind talks about how being gay in India is different from being gay in the west. As he puts it, "In India, we don't have closets, we have almirahs!"

Arvind is an articulate and confident young man with his feet firmly on the ground. Definitely a voice that cannot be unheard, a face that cannot be left unseen.

THE STORY OF REVATHI

***Tushar M**. speaks to Revathi, south India's most well known face of the transgendered community. Having faced discrimination and harassment throughout her life, her mission now remains to untangle her own community from ages of neglect and ridicule.*

It is late in the morning when Prachi and I get to the inner reaches of Bangalore's Cubbon Park. We have a date with a very special person, and we're late.

On reaching our rendezvous point I see Akil, our interpreter, standing and chatting up Revathi. She, inconspicuous in her simple peach salwaar kameez, seems to be enjoying the conversation.

"I'm sorry we're late. We got caught up in traffic", I apologize to her as we get acquainted. I ask her where she'd like to sit while we interview her. She takes us to this nice shady part of the park where we sit under a tree and start talking.

"I like sitting outside, with nature around me. It's rare that I get a chance to sit out without people noticing me and staring", she says.

In her early forties, Revathi stands out as a very strong woman. Her face reflects the years of pain and ill-treatment she withstood, but nonetheless is lit up with a smile. Revathi is a transgendered woman, and one of the most prominent activists in southern India dealing with transgender issues. What makes her endeavor different is that she caters to the grassroots level - the non-English speaking transgender community in Karnataka and surrounding states.

As a young child, Annadurai (her childhood name) always loved to play around with women's clothes. What was once a much encouraged activity in childhood became an oddity in her teenage years. She was in constant turmoil about how she felt; how she never really identified herself as a boy.

"In the hijra society, there are only two respectable professions - begging or prostitution."

"On one school trip to Namakkal, I came across a bunch of men walking on the street wearing women's clothes. Curiosity got hold of me; here there were people who I thought I could associate with. They were a bunch of kothis(cross-dressers) and I longed to talk to them. I overcame my initial shyness and went on and talked to them about my problem; how I felt different from the others"

And off ran Annadurai to Delhi, where the kothis had assured he'd have a better place to find himself, and gain acceptance in the hijra society.

"In the hijra society, there are only two respectable professions - begging or prostitution. I started begging at the traffic lights. It wasn't something I'd call a job; I disliked it. But an empty stomach needs to be fed. Plus, I finally had the freedom to express myself as a woman."

But the happiness wasn't to last long. One truck driver from her village noticed her on the traffic light and forcefully brought her back home, where her whole family beat her up and kept her locked in a room. They dragged her to the temple and shaved her head, humiliating her in front of everyone, and put her to work as a lorry cleaner.

The ordeal continued further and she ran off to Mumbai, where six months later she had her sex change operation. She got into prostitution, expecting a life full of money and happiness. But she cringes at the thought.

"People from all age groups came to me. No one actually cared, after all it was only for the sex. Some of them were violent. But once you're a prostitute, you learn never to complain; to hold the pain inside and go on as if you don't feel anything. Often, times were so bad that I had to resort to charging as low as Rs 20; sometimes I had to sleep on the roadside. And then there were the rowdies, who used to harass me to have free sex, and if I refused, they used to take out knives. Rape was commonplace."

"Often times were so bad that I had to resort to charging as low as Rs 20; sometimes I had to sleep on the roadside. And then there were the rowdies, who used to harass me to have free sex, and if I refused, they used to take out knives. Rape was commonplace."

The horrors of Mumbai made her long to go back home, and live her life on her terms in her hometown. But this time, she was not going to stand any maltreatment. She stood up for her beliefs and her identity when her family tried to beat her up, and even threatened to go to the police. But the ill treatment continued.

"I was not allowed to attend family functions. People came to the house and behaved as if I was an ill-person; as if I had a dreaded sickness. I wasn't allowed out of the house, and if I was I had to wear men's clothes, which I despised."

With that thought, she fled to Bangalore, in search of a better life. Prostitution continued, so did the harassment, and this time by the police too.

"The police used me to arrest my customers. Then, on whim, they arrested me for prostitution. I was stripped bare; my private parts were prodded and made fun of. They made me clean prison floors, and do all sorts of menial work. I was taken to court, but never allowed to enter. They took all my money and threw me out. I could never complain, as I had to work at the same place every night."

She rolls up a sleeve and shows me the nasty scar left from a fight years ago with rowdies. "No matter what I do," she says, "the ghosts of the past will haunt me."

It's then that she gave up prostitution and joined Sangama, an NGO working for the upliftment of sexual minorities. She started off as an office assistant. The pay was not lucrative, she admits, but it was a respectable job and she felt happier at being able to help her community; to give back to it. Her family stopped talking to her; the gifts she was able to send back home from the earnings from her previous job had stopped. She realised her status back home, and kept on working with Sangama.

And it's at Sangama that she realized that her life was happier than of some of those whose stories she heard during her tenure. She realized the negative portrayal of the hijra community in the media and decided to work towards changing their image.

"My story needed to be told, not once but millions of times. I wanted them to realize that we, after all, are humans, and not some twisted species."

But the major hurdle she encountered was her own community's anger at her speaking out. They were angry at her going and talking to the media about their issues; unlike every other community they did not want media exposure.

"They cursed me whenever I went to talk to them. They were angry that I was serving in an office; according to them hijras should be giving badhai and not working in offices. They shouted at me for exposing the corruption within the community. But I still went on talking to them. After three years of my efforts, some more from the community joined Sangama."

Being from a non-English speaking environment and working for the lower strata of the sexual minorities, she rightly knows what the community needs. "We want the politicians and police thinking about our needs too. When someone in the community needs help, the police doesn't really care much. I demand that we too get proper redressal in court, 24 hour help lines, women policemen to handle our cases, and equality in all spheres. Why is it that I cannot find a house, and even when someone agrees to lease their house they charge double? Why is it that I'm overcharged by auto drivers? Why is it that I had to face so many hassles before getting a passport or a driver's license? And why does police loiter around wherever I stand, as if I'm committing a crime by standing on the roadside? Don't I have the same rights as everyone?"

"My story needed to be told, not once but millions of times. I wanted them to realise that we, after all, are humans, and not some twisted species."

In the past ten years of her working with Sangama, she went from being a simple Office Assistant to being the Director, and now an Advocacy Coordinator. She is enthusiastic about her job, but agrees that it's very demanding. That's why she took a year off in 2004 and wrote a book, and a technical writeup on the Hijra culture for the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust. Her autobiography, titled 'The truth about me', is currently being edited and will be published by Penguin later this year.

Even though her work takes up most of her time, she does take time off to entertain guests at home, throwing dinners and get togethers after rallies. She constantly helps out in rallies and meetings. Her dream of being a teacher was finally fulfilled when she started going to universities and colleges talking about the hijra community, it's culture and it's problems and, of course, her work. Revathi is very fond of acting too, ever since childhood. Very recently, a Tamil movie 'Thenavattu' featured her and was aired on television in 2009.

I ask her about her views on the amendment of Section 377, and her face brightens up. "I can see a lot of changes after the amendment. It's like we finally have some rights, legally. I feel good that our collective efforts have lead to this historic judgment."

I wind up with the interview and Prachi rushes to Revathi to show her the pictures she clicked. She smiles as she goes through her pictures, and is visibly delighted.

"Mail me all the photos for sure. I look nice", she beams.

We walk back to the exit gates of Cubbon Park. It's almost time for her to leave to catch a bus to Nagercoil, where she has a meeting. Next week, she's off to Bangladesh for another conference. In her life, there's a lot to do, and so less time.

"I like being with other people. Alone, I feel afraid of the society's ridicule, even today. Sometimes I go back home to visit my family. And sometimes in the evenings, I like to wear my saree and go for a long drive on my Kinetic Honda scooter, with my hair open and the wind blowing, and men admiring me. It makes me feel like a woman. And it's these times which I love the most."

Credits: Prachi (photography)
Akil (Tamil interpretation)

Pink Pages are often not so pink, they are Red!

Sourendra Kumar Das recounts Harish Iyer's tale of pain and humiliation and his ultimate triumph as he puts his past behind- a childhood scarred by sexual abuse by his own uncle.

Chapter 1

It was one of those usual Monday evenings when the week starts with loads of activities in an ordinary man's life. I finished covering a fascinating International Dance Recital, gaily submerged in the music and dance which still rang in my ears.

I sit down at a coffee shop to tell you the tale of a boy who was born on April 16. No it is not the famous Charlie Chaplin, but a friend of mine with an extraordinary fate. He was rather born as a cute and chubby child who was very fond of remaining in people's lap.

My friend's brother who is two years younger than him is an exact opposite and a small crybaby. My friend was the apple of everyone's eye and everything was just as fine as it must have been in your life.

Six summers latter, his uncle took him inside the bathroom to get the apple a shower, that's when the doors closed and his pants dropped. He would not have mind seeing it, but he was too young. The little child had to quaff the phallus of his uncle which he found very repulsive. He moved away and was about to scream like it happens in films, when he heard his aunt's voice who wanted to go to the market.

His uncle took him inside the bathroom to get the apple a shower, that's when the doors closed and his pants dropped

He had his first anal sex at the age of six, even though he wanted to scream but he did not know what to do, so he left that to his own fate. He was being told to hide everything from his aunt and thus when she came back from the market, it was the very natural uncle-nephew relationship that sustained. Every part of the sex was hidden and locked for another eleven years.

His uncle sexually abused my friend as often he would get chance to pounce on this little boy. Till the age of eighteen, he never said no, he did not know how to say no either!

He had all female friends in school and he never trusted a man. "I only had one boy friend whose name was Alok (name changed on my friend's request). He was a guy from my school, a dear friend I was very fond of. Perhaps I really felt very close to him as a friend as I opened all the pages of my life to him," revealed my friend.

Alok would say, "Aaisa bhi hota hai..."

"I thought perhaps the same incident happened in his life too that he would not share with me. Perchance this was the way one learns about sex," said Harish. Now that you know him quite a lot, I do not mind sharing his name.

The affectionate uncle would take him to salon for hair-cut and on his way back home, he would abuse the child. "I was been beaten up for not getting an erection when I was six years old and I would see his phallus smeared in the blood mixed with his sperm after he would finish his orgasm," recalls Harish.

In his younger days, he could never unburden his heart to anyone but before he would do that everyone in his college knew the big secret about him. "I remember taking a push pencil box in school that was most fashionable those days. More so, I would buy two sets of the pencil box, one for me and another for Alok. I remember waking up extra hours in the night and finishing his homework too. But when my father's business suffered loss and I could not afford to buy anything for him, Alok revealed my secret to everyone in the college," bares Harish.

One fine day, while he entered the college Harish just shook hands with a girl friend, when a boy shouted, "Usse haath math milaa. Woh toh apne uncle ke saath sooke aaya hai..." Harish turned his hand and kept his wrist above mine and I could see the deep scar that was visible!

One fine day, while he entered the college Harish just shook hands with a girl friend, when a boy shouted, "Usse haath math milaa. Woh toh apne uncle ke saath sooke aaya hai..."

There was a long pause that followed next. It was so unbearable that I broke by saying, "Do you think I should send you the draft before I publish the story?" To that he humbly replies in three small words, "I trust you."

There was a newspaper that he does not want me to name wrote Harish was sexually abused by his father. "It would have blazed up emotions back home, thanks to one journalist friend who wanted me to check the draft before it went for print" said Harish.

The college friends who behaved hard to him made him tougher from inside. The bathrooms of his college in Mumbai had graffiti like, "FOR GAY SEX, CONTACT HARISH @ 2495582*" That was way back in 1995, when mobile phones were not that popular in India. "In our classroom they would write 'Gur ka baccha' with chalk in my seat and the whole impression would be embossed in my pants. My college days were more painful than the childhood days of sexual abuse," sighs my friend.

(This feature will continue in the next issue...)

The Hippie

A hippie gets on a bus and proceeds to sit next to a Nun in the front seat. The hippie the asked the nun if she would have sex with him. Surprised, the Nun politely declines and gets off at the next stop.

When the bus resumes, the bus driver says to the hippie "if you want I can tell you how you can get that nun to have sex with you!" The hippie says of course, the driver tells him that every Tuesday evening at midnight she goes to the cemetery to Pray to the Lord. " If you went dressed in Robes and glowing powder," said the male bus driver "you could tell her you were God and command her to have sex with you!"

The hippie goes out the next Tuesday evening. And right on schedule the Nun shows up. In the middle of Praying, he comes out of hiding, in Robes and glowing with the mask of the God. " I am God, I've heard your Prayers and I will answer them but you must first give yourself to me!" The nun agrees but asked for anal sex so that she might keep her virginity. The hippie agrees and quickly goes to work on the Nun.

After the hippie finishes, he rips off the mask and shouts out "Ha ha, I'm the hippie!"
The Nun replies by whipping off her hood and shouting, Ha ha, I'm the bus driver!!"

Akhil Katyal has an extended emailed interview with founder of the hugely popular gay dating website PlanetRomeo who reveals his motivations for the site, his experience with PR and internet dating so far and the latest merger with Guys4Men.

For Love and Everything Else

a rendezvous with the Founder of PlanetRomeo.Com

By Akhil Katyal

A small part of this story begins in London. In 2002 a young German man came to stay in the city and, like most urban migrants, tried to find new networks of friends and lovers for some good times. Jens found that the easiest way to search for other men 'of his ilk' was the internet. Soon enough, he sets about trying his glass slipper on every Cinderella in town who's logged in. A few days into it, however, he faces a problem. He finds that most dating portals, apart from being a great deal unnavigable, weigh heavily on his pockets. He has to shell out a few extra pounds every time to avoid abrupt closures of chat windows.

By the early years of this last decade, the same time as Jens began his searches, online romance had already become a big business; U.S. consumers alone were spending close to $500 million on personals/dating content in 2003, up by nearly fifty percent from the year before. Our protagonist's problem is not at all surprising; it is a part of what had already been memoed by Saskia Sassen at the turn of the century, that the internet, in its brief history, has already entered a fourth phase, a phase organized mainly under the sign of e-commerce and all the internet's backbone softwares are chiefly linked to billing, identity-verification and trademarks protection. Love and sex were no exception to this rule and could be the best of billed items.

Love, which the French phrase for love at first sight - coup de foudre (literally 'a blow by lightning') suggests, happens suddenly, almost hitting you when it does, could now be slowly

By the early years of this last decade, the same time as Jens began his searches, online romance had already become a big business; U.S. consumers alone were spending close to $500 million on personals/dating content in 2003, up by nearly fifty percent from the year before.

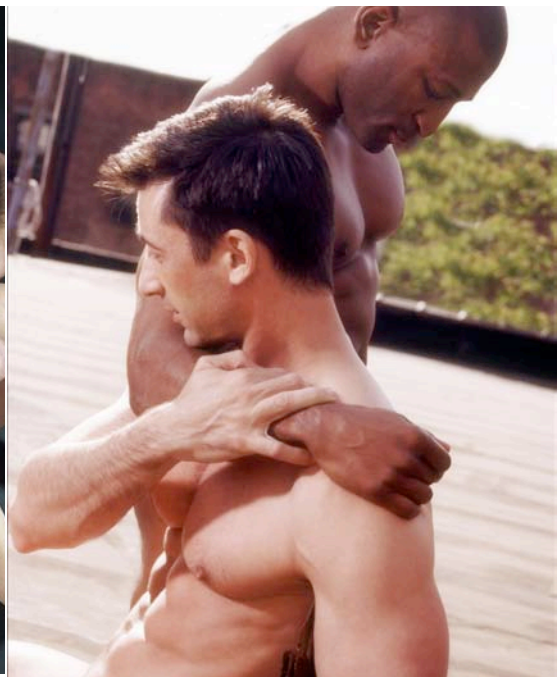
scoured for on the web. Thunderbolts could be arranged. It now becomes only a matter of going about the search the right way. Jens says later in this interview that 'you may miss on the 'love of your life' simply because you haven't put the right criteria in your search'. That's some pressure!

Love is after all at once a secular and a sacred feeling. All romantic self-help of the last hundred years tells you that you have to work for love to happen and to last, but when it does happen and when it does last, it's likened to magic or miracles. Love is approached as labour but received as a gift. Even Adrienne Rich, the American poet, turned coats within two consecutive poems in her 1976 collection of love poems: 'The more I live, the more I think, two people together is a miracle' (poem 18). 'Or in this poem, there are no miracles…if I could let you know…two people together is a work, heroic in its ordinariness' (poem 19). And that's the strange thing about love. When only passion does not guarantee you longevity, you spin stories to make it last. Even love at first sight is in that sense a story. In it, what is actually a moment is already understood as a beginning. What is only an enthrallment is afterwards recounted as an opening scene geared towards something else, a shared story. Or if we say that most people, practically speaking, do not believe in love at first sight, that they are far more realistic to do so, then we are asking a question about love which is always already a question of form - a question of realism like in a novel or in all that modern romance self-help or myth like in medieval epic romances or in the greeting cards churned out by romance industry giants that trade in all the talk of soul-mates and love-for-life. Love has to last despite the fact that enthrallment never does. This is why Jens, as you read below, is confused when escorts look for their 'great love' or a 'partner for life' through their escort profiles. Jens thinks it's wacky - this very combining of the business of immediate attraction and sex to the elaborate game of love too sacred to be touched by money.

Anyway, our lad's money crunch in London had given him an idea. Earlier in spring that year, he had already chosen to ride the e-market brainwave and had started a website with a friend/business partner that aimed to relocate a section of the prolific urban escort/client trade from dirty magazines' back pages to the web; this was done by the name of Erados.com (now fully integrated into PlanetRomeo). Cobbling together the programme codes from this website, Jens and Manuel sprung the first version of 'GayRomeo', a 'gay' dating website, onto the internet by the October of that year. Before the year had ended, 'the good old gay grapevine,' they say, had worked and there were already 3000 free registered users.

Over the next few years the website moved its offices from London to a little room in a backyard of a building in the Friedrichshain district in Berlin and to more roomy quarters in the 'wild, wild' east side of the German capital by 2004. By the means of a chargeable Plus account, over and above the usual free user account, money had begun to flow in and the website, now a limited company (as all ventures seem to become!), grew both in numbers and web reach. However, the strict provisions of the German Act for the Protection of Young Persons and Minors, which effectively required that every user be personally verified through rigorous identificatory softwares like PostIdent or Schufa (the German credit protection agency) meant that either GayRomeo had to close shop or remove all its users' 'hardcore' photos. This personalized checking was both expensive, complicated and smacked of unfreedom. The company chose a third option and, in the summer of 2006, happily exiled itself to Amsterdam where the courts were lax, and as they hoped, so were the morals.

"With more than 1 million active users of the website worldwide and around 90,000 guys online simultaneously on our website it is likely that you can't keep track of everyone and you may miss on the 'love of your life' simply because you haven't put the right criteria in your search."



In March 2009, by when GayRomeo (also by then, called Planetromeo) had more than 900,000 profiles from just about every country on the planet, it chose the familiar corporate strategy of merger to expand its business. Merging guys4men that was already popular in Asia and America, with Planet Romeo that hoarded most of the European 'gay internet sector,' meant that it became the biggest portal online for men seeking out other men for friendship, sex or romance. By this time, they had already begun seeing facebook and myspace as competition.

As of the beginning of 2010 there were about fifty thousand Indian user profiles hosted on the website. This short history of PR – that jumps from the lonely hearts in the highways of London to east side Berlin, to the Dutch capital, while it keeps on exploding onto the thousands of computer screens around the world, including south Asia – is already a big transnational tale. It sets the stage for all the talk of the worldwide 'genuine gay community' that the PR team constantly bandies in its publicity material. Indian users of PR, befitting this tale, use a heady mix of references. It is not surprising at all to find photographs of Brad Pitt and Shahrukh Khan or Daniel Radcliffe and Shahid Kapoor used as profile pictures by people in Raipur or Meerut in India, references to the San Francisco 'bondage scene' or the Chilean Pokemon subcultures among Kolkata users, or citations from Ghalib and Robert Frost and Timberlake or Sultanpuri jostling with each other in the same profile. PR, like most of the internet, is so relentlessly an impure space that it always keeps on quoting too many (sources) and too much (information) at the same time. Men here look for everything from love and friendship, 'family-friends' and travel-buddies, 'fun and masti' (the phrase is done to death!) and mazaa, even a sense of belonging and a chance to escape.

I talk here with Jens, one of the founders of the website. The interview was carried over emails sent back and forth between him in Amsterdam and me in London in January earlier this year. (Also, if at some points Jens' replies sound like a PlanetRomeo ad, it is only a sign of how issues of 'gay community' are often plugged in the ways capital flows in our worlds! He can't just talk of the website without promoting it!)

"Chemistry...it's also a good built-in exit strategy. Some users look great 'on paper' but when you finally meet them in person, there is no magic. In that case you can simply say: 'Sorry, there is no chemistry'..."

AK: As you would know, the first personal ad ever to be published was by a spinster in Manchester - Helen Morrison - who placed it in 'The Manchester Weekly Journal' in 1727. Within four weeks, the mayor had committed her to a lunatic asylum. We seem to have come a long way from then with millions of lonely hearts personals floating on the web. Has love become a more 'searchable' item lately? Or are we mad enough to go on ?

Jens: It's a little bit of both. It is true that nowadays with the advent and rapid expansion of the internet, love has become a bit of a commodity, especially when love means dating and sex. You can go online and shop for
a husband, a sex partner, a 'slave', a 'master' and the list goes on and on. On the other hand, gay people are mad enough to persevere, especially since coming out and going out hasn't always been an easy thing to do and for a lot of gays still isn't an easy thing to do.

AK: The trigger that got Planet Romeo started was loneliness of a boy in London, an inability to meet the 'right' guy, the perfect Cinderella fit. In some sense Planet Romeo sells that which is the common dream of our times that in our lives we will find a special person who will salvage us. Has the website made this search easier or messier?

Jens: Although internet can never really replace physical contact, it is a great jumping board to make acquaintances. So PR makes it easier to make the first step and put yourself out there. That has definitely been made a lot easier, since its rather anonymous and you can turn it off any time you want. On the other hand, it has made the search perhaps more
complicated too. With more than 1 million active users of the website worldwide and around 90,000 guys online simultaneously on our website it is likely that you can't keep track of everyone and you may miss on the 'love of your life' simply because you haven't put the right criteria in your search.

AK: 'Planet Romeo' was started by you, German guys based in London who then moved back to Berlin to expand the company till legal restrictions made you guys shift base to Amsterdam? So you guys have moved around a lot. How has it been?

Jens: It's been quite stressful because we were basically chased from our old place. For example, the move from Berlin to amsterdam was necessitated because of changes in German law. On the other hand, moving a lot is also what made us who we are. Quite a lot of our users go on GayRomeo to find friends from in other places and countries. Because we had first-hand experience on that, we know exactly how to facilitate cross-countries encounters in a more productive and safe way. One example is our Travel Ads system through which you can 'advertise yourself' in the city or region which you are visiting.

AK: Most of the users on the website are in some sense looking for a miracle, for someone who will suddenly overwhelm them by being the perfect match; some of the bywords for this phenomenon on 'planetromeo' profiles are 'if it clicks', 'chemistry', 'spark', 'tuning', 'someone special', 'compatibility' etc.. Don't you find it strange that people should put so much effort looking for something that in their own words happens suddenly, effortlessly, and almost miraculously?

Jens: 'The search for the one' is something that remains important for a lot of us. And as said before, that is not only regarding finding a 'life partner,' it can be and also often will be a search for a person for special experiences, for a short or longer period, sex-related or not, or a search for a guide or a club or interest-group. So, people don't only search for fairy tales. Our users are much more aware of the fact that fairy tales don't really happen, unless you want to see it that way. All these words you mentioned, 'if it clicks,' 'chemistry,' show the opposite of what you claim. They show that our users are much more cautious. When you meet someone outside, you'll know quite instantly if it clicks or not. When you want to meet people online, you need to set some criteria. Next to your fact-based stats and rigid information about someone's life and physical appearance, our users need to factor in other parameters too, more vague ones. Chemistry is one of them. It's also a good built-in exit strategy. Some users look great 'on paper' but when you finally meet them in person, there is no magic. In that case you can simply say: 'Sorry, there is no chemistry'. Our users are aware of the restraints of internet dating. And, for some people, having a profile on GayRomeo takes a lot less effort than going out to bars and clubs every night.

AK: Earlier this year two biggest 'gay' personals sites on the web joined hands when Guys4men merged into Planet Romeo. Tell us the story behind that merger. Do you think in terms of a world wide 'gay community'?

Jens: Even before the merger we were thinking in terms of a global community. And that is thanks to the great potential of the internet. The web collapses distances and gives us a (new) sense that we all live in one place, in a virtual portable homeland we call: the world wide web. At GayRomeo we want to realize that potential of the internet and in a way unite our users under a platform that will make them feel at home, where-ever they are. Additionally by highlighting gay rights issues with a global perspective and by providing community and health information, we try to reinforce the sense of community among our users, the sense that we are all 'on the same boat' and that we need to work together if we want to prosper as a social minority. We are not just a contact site. Sense of belonging to a community more than just mere sex hunting.

AK: How profitable is this business of love and sex?

Jens: We've been doing ok so far. We have managed to keep the services free for users, without the need for any external investment. That's important if we want to stay truly independent.

AK: What are the wackiest personals you've ever read? Something that stayed with you.

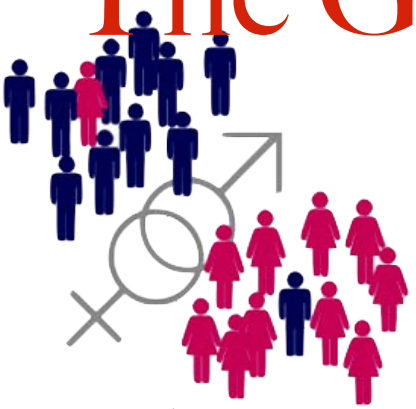
Jens: Some Escorts looking for their 'great love' or a 'partner for life' through their escort profiles.

AK: Lastly, there are many complaints you guys receive from users for banning fakers, people with disability, fat people, 'unattractive' people etc.. If there is one growth industry on online forums it seems to be that of complaint and hatred. What do you write back to these people?

Jens: We want to keep the balance between freedom and respect for all. We don't want to police anyone's thoughts and ideas and we also don't want to give voice to prejudices and hate speech. Juggling with these two concepts is sometimes rather difficult. We aim to provide an environment where people will treat each other with respect. We do sometimes get complaints about 'no fat guys' type statements and mainly we advise people not to take it personally and simply to accept it as a rather unimaginative indication of sexual preference. But if a statement is more overtly insulting or racist we do take action.

The Gender Conundrum

Science



Prashant Kumar delves into the mysteries of functional sexuality which is the combination of both biological and psychological factors. Although biological gender can be easily found out and corrected if need be, genetic and brain gender cannot be corrected because they are as much a part of an individual as are the colors of our eyes, hair, skin and allergies.

This is a genuinely vast subject - actually a science in itself. Sex as a concept is the need of all animal species and is needed in order to continue the process of natural selection and evolution. So, no wonder sex is important. But, humans are not just animals and since, they can think, they have an additional component to sex and that is psychological. So sexuality becomes the aggregation of both biological and psychological sexuality. It is worth noting that most animals can't think about sex like human beings. Their urges and sexual cycles are dictated by natural biological clocks, but in humans we have a great gift of controlling, simulating and understanding sex as more than a biological process, it is a social nuance too. Now we all know that genetically, sex is decided by the father's contribution of X or Y chromosome. X leads to a girl embryo and Y makes a boy embryo. This is the Genetic gender of the embryo. But, what it's to be gender is, shall be decided by a number of other factors. As of now the embryo is unisexed and not differentiated. It is known that brain cells develop much before the sexual organs of the fetus. So, fetus asks the mother body for an indication as to which brain to develop, a male or a female brain. Interestingly, mother's body is full of estrogen which becomes the default texture of the embryo's brain. Problem arises when the mother's body delays the supply of testosterone due to abnormalities caused by trauma, poor nutrition or medication. In such circumstances, even the male fetus develops a female brain. If a female fetus receives testosterone, it develops a male brain. These neuron connections and brain develop the same way for rest of the life. This is the brain's gender. Finally, comes the time when the fetus develops sexual organs. This is the physiological gender.

Most animals can't think about sex like human beings. Their urges and sexual cycles are dictated by natural biological clocks, but in humans we have a great gift of controlling, simulating and understanding sex as more than a biological process, it is a social nuance too.

Sometimes, pregnancy abnormalities lead to the new born having ambiguous organs, both male and female organs or wrong organs. At times, these change as the child grows and at times they don't and are accompanied by endocrine (hormonal) dysfunctions; then the organs have to be cosmetically created. Moving further, there is social and parental grooming that gives a child its initial gender identity, this is the psychological gender. Interestingly, functional sexuality is the combination of these and the one that prevails taking all these influences in mind. Although biological gender can be easily found out and corrected if need be, genetic and brain gender cannot be corrected because they are as much a part of an individual as are the colors of our eyes, hair, skin and allergies. In the end no one can decide the sexuality but for an individual alone. It is beyond an individual's control to manipulate sexuality. It all depends on and as to what are you comfortable with and nothing else. For all we know, most people might not be perfectly male or female. It is important that early in adolescence gender identity or one's sexuality is determined, accepted and endorsed. Suppression of various flavors of sexualities tends to create psychological barriers and disorders.

THE PERFECT RELATIONSHIP

By Niket

Niket writes about the ups and downs of young gay love- the trials and tribulations, the joys and tears, in the process discovering just what it takes to make a relationship perfect.

Being in a relationship is now such an El Dorado, especially in the gay community where being in one is looked upon as the ultimate goal of one's personal live. But why do we seek a relationship, preferably a long term committed one? Is it because society dictates so or is it that being in a relationship gives a strong political statement to all those opposing gay marriages, or is there something stronger - a deeper part of our inner being that makes us want to find someone to spend our lives with. Also if it's one of our strongest wants why finding a perfect relationship is so difficult for many gay men while almost everyone has a best friend.

Friendships and relationships are two seemingly different concepts, but are in fact so alike that it seems the only difference between a best friend and a life partner is the physical intimacy shared between the couple, and if they are so similar then why does building a relationship seems so incredibly difficult whereas making friends is easy, and even best friendships do form without all the drama involved between the people in a relationship.

Oscar Wilde once said. "A man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth." I believe this to be the reason we all seek companionship, friendship, relationships that is, to find a person apart from the rest with whom we could be ourselves without the mask, who accepts us as we are and in whose company we feel good, at peace and happy.

But as we all know relationships don't come easy especially in the gay community. We are quite ill-famed for being promiscuous and for being unable to form long term relationships. Let us try to understand why this is so and in the process maybe we would be able to gather some pearls of wisdom for ourselves. Followings is the story of two best friends Mr. X & Mr. Y and their journey towards finding a perfect life partner and the various ups and downs they had to go through in their journey towards finding love.

They were both young when they started looking, one was in his late teens & the other in the middle, both came from similar families, were raised in similar environments, went to the same school and were intact so alike that they ended up being the best of friends. The outcome of their search for love however was quite different. So come along let's take a look into their lives and see what happened.

the curse of "Virgin Love"

Many cultures through the world teach that one should remain a virgin till they get married, although the idea seems absurd in the modern world there seems to be some substance in it. As I am quite sure many of us remember the first guy we had sex with, and most if not all did fall in love with him. This sensation of falling in love with the first person with whom one has mutual intimate relationships seems to be the reason behind the "remain a virgin till they get married" philosophy.

It happened so with both Mr. X and Mr. Y that at a young age they fell in love. Mr. X had just moved to a new city to start off his college education, he met a charming young man through the miracle of the internet, they went on a couple of dates before falling into bed together, and that weekend was the beginning of Mr. X's first love. As for Mr. Y, the guy he fell in love with for the first time was someone he had met at a friend's party, they both found a common interest in each other and ended up in the sack the next day. Since it was Mr. Y's first time with anyone he instantly fell in love with this guy not knowing that the other guy was well versed in the art of seduction and

intimate contacts so much so that for him it was nothing more than a one night stand. But Mr. Y was in love, and remained so for a long time, denying all rational thought which said there the other guy was not interested in anything more. After spending countless nights awake wondering why the other guy was not responding to his calls, why would he not show any interest, trying to understand what can he do to show the guy how much he loved him, indeed doing everything he could to make the other guy love him, Mr. X finally accepted that pursuing this ghost of love any further was useless and he moved on.

Why is it that we seek love in our teens even though there is a whole vast world to sample, why do we then want to settle down with one person this early in life, maybe the reason is that in all of us the need to find a companion at a young age in ingrained in our subconscious.

Meanwhile Mr. Y was having a wonderful time, for the first time ever in his life he had a boyfriend whom he loved very much and it seemed that the feelings were mutual. All the things expected in a relationship such as commitment, adoration and peace came naturally; there was no one else with whom he would rather be. For Mr. Y there was no one else, no other was needed for his guy was enough. But alas, this young love too was not meant to last, the guy as it turns out was bi-sexual and his long term plans included getting married and having a wife and kinds. Mr. Y when he came to know of this

Friendships and relationships are two seemingly different concepts, but are in fact so alike that it seems the only difference between a best friend and a life partner is the physical intimacy shared between the couple.

was devastated and heartbroken, something that seemed so right was ending so soon and that too because the other guy was too chicken to come out, and settled instead to creating a straight life for himself such that society would accept.

Both Mr. X and Mr. Y eventually did recover from their first love and went on to have other relationships but that's a story for next time. Meanwhile their first love was never forgotten and even though they moved on they still remember their first time with both fond and bitter memories. Why is it that we seek love in our teens even though there is a whole vast world to sample, why do we then want to settle down with one person this early in life, maybe the reason is that in all of us the need to find a companion at a young age in ingrained in our subconscious, a companion with whom we could be ourselves with without a mask, a companion around our own age with whom we could both grow together as one, understanding and learning about the world and each other, being the one who understands the other better than they do themselves all because they grew up together as one. Just imagine how wonderful your life would be of this were to be so.

(This was the first article in a series on gay relationships. In the next issue this column will deal with a different aspect of the same.)

Are you in an abusive relationship?

By Niket

So you think abusive relationships are only limited to straight people? The experts are now certain that you're wrong. An astonishingly high number of LGBT people are victims of physical and psychological abuse by their partners, most often not realizing this, and therefore not able to take any corrective steps.

Take this quiz to find out exactly how healthy your relationship is. Answer with an yes or no.

My partner

- Is very supportive of things that I do.
- Encourages me to try new things.
- Likes to listen when I have something on my mind.
- Understands that I have my own life too.
- Is not liked very well by my friends.
- Says I'm too involved in different activities.
- Texts me or calls me all the time.
- Thinks I spend too much time trying to look nice.
- Gets extremely jealous or possessive.
- Accuses me of flirting or cheating.
- Constantly checks up on me or makes me check in.
- Controls what I wear or how I look.
- Tries to control what I do and who I see.
- Tries to keep me from seeing or talking to my family and friends.
- Has big mood swings — yells at me one minute, and the next minute is apologetic.
- Makes me feel nervous.
- Puts me down and criticises me.
- Makes me feel like I can't do anything right.
- Makes me feel like no one else would want me.
- Threatens to hurt me, my friends or family.
- Threatens to hurt him/herself because of me.
- Threatens to destroy my things.
- Grabs, pushes, shoves or chokes to hurt me.
- Breaks things or throws things to intimidate me.
- Yells, screams or humiliates me in front of others.
- Pressures or forces me into having sex.
- Threatens to "out" me to my family/friends
- Becomes violent or controlling when she or he is under the influence of drugs or alcohol

To rate your score

Give yourself one point for every 'no' you answer to questions 1 - 4; one point for every 'yes' response to numbers 5 - 8 and one point for every 'yes' to question s 9 - 28.

Now tally your score

0 points: Congratulations on a happy and healthy relationship!
1-2 points: Apparently there are some signs of trouble in your relationship. Keep an eye on your partner and communicate well.
3-4 points: You may be seeing some warning signs of an abusive relationship. Seek help from relevant people.
5 points or more: High alert! You are in an abusive relationship and need to take immediate steps.

THE GAY AGENDA

AHAM, THE ME: TRUTH IS THE STRANGER, NOT FICTION
Harish Iyer

"TODAY, I WAS FIRED FOR BEING A FAGGOT..."
Diepiriye Kuku

ME LORD, I OBJECT!
Ahana Bannerjie

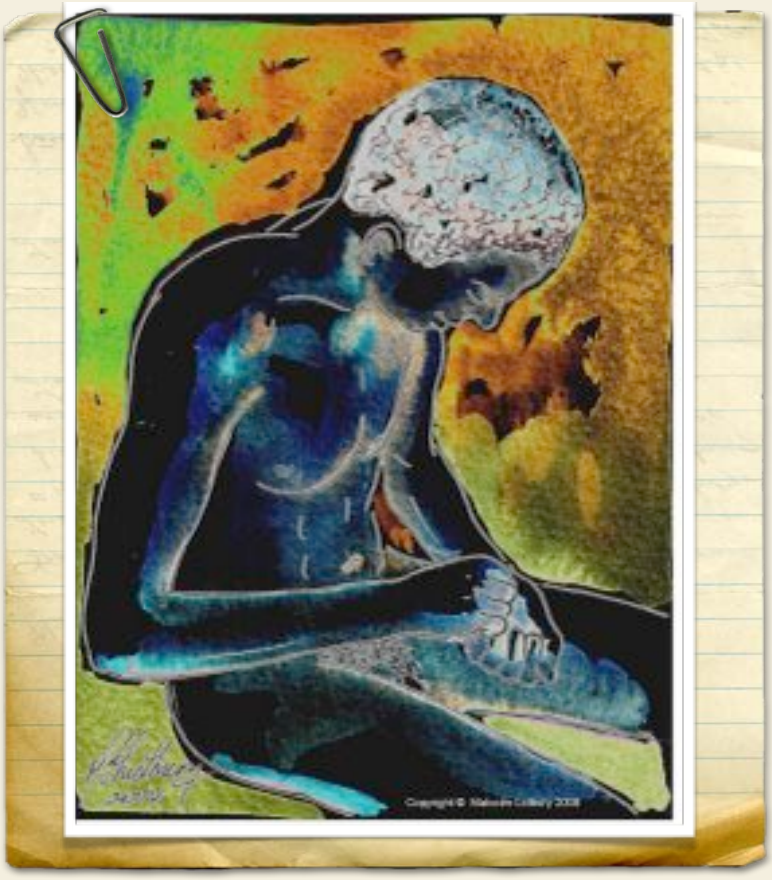
Aham, the Me: Truth is the stranger, not fiction

HARISH IYER

He requested me to hold his penis. I obliged. And hell broke as I touched his penis. He slapped me real hard.

He was handsome. Nice. Good looking. He flaunted his dimple, looked rich. He was appeasing and pleasing; he left my hormones bumping and heart pumping. I met him at the loo. A public loo. A place not so sacrosanct for meeting someone for the first time, I know. I found him handsome, and his eyes said that the feeling was mutual. Time was fleeting, every second seemed an hour. I wanted my body to collide with his. Feel his lips with mine. But I had no time. I had my mother waiting for me home. And before I could make the move and give him "those" looks… my ringtone broke the monotony. It was my mom; she was screeching "dinner is set, where the hell you are". I softly replied "on my way", she hung up the phone and my fate hanged in a misbalance of thoughts. My mind was back in the drain. It was a feeling insane. And before I could gather all my thoughts, he moved behind the urinal and flashed his willy. I got scared, my face charred, and my fright was on my face bare. I rushed out of the unholy place. I was horny, but I wasn't willing to "do it" with a stranger. An absolute stranger.

He followed me. I got into a different building to deceive him. After around 5 minutes I got down the strange building and headed home. And yippee, finally I breathe a sigh of relief, now that the drama has ended. I joyously hip-hopped to my home, played with my dog. I stood at my balcony to feel the wind. And aghast I was. He stood there, smiling and winking at me. I wasn't out-n-about then. I was scared now that I was busted. He stood there giving me signals for a while and later vanished into the oblivion.

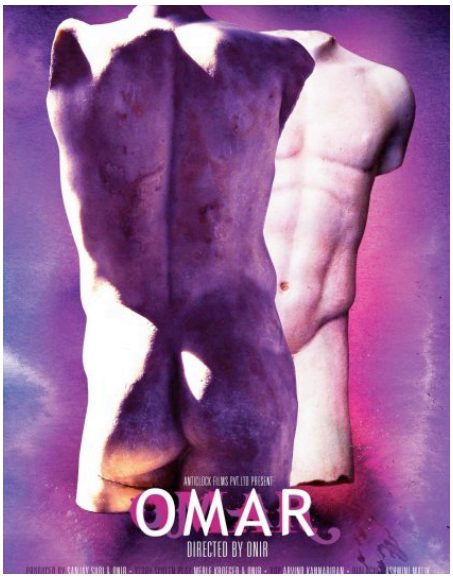


Days passed, I never saw him again. Eons later, I again went to the same loo with no other intention other than emptying my bladder. As I was about to leave, I found the same stranger. This time, he had a smile that said much more than what it did before. I was also not that petrified. He followed me out and as I walked briskly, he walked beside me. I tried ignoring him, as his hands collided with mine while walking. Suddenly, he firmly held my hand. I looked at him with a smirk. He asked- "jagaah hai mere paas, paas mein hi hai" (I have place, it is close by) I replied "abhi nahi" (not now). He insisted and I kept refusing. Suddenly, he pulled my hand and took me to the water tank of a building. As we reached there, he unzipped and popped out his penis and asked me to blow him. I tried running away. He requested me to hold his penis. I obliged. And hell broke as I touched his penis. He slapped me real hard. He screamt "saala Matherc!@d, Gud… mooh mein lega, har!@mi. police ko bataoo kyaa?" (Mother fuc@#$, faggot, you will blow??, bastard!, should I report to the police). I was petrified. And as I was speaking to him, there was a policeman passing by, giving the stranger the "I know you" look. The stranger still had his penis visible. Though his backside was facing the policeman. The stranger slapped me multiple times, and demanded a blow. I was scared. He scanned my wallet and took even the change I had. Luckily, I wasn't wearing my gold chain. After money and pleasure, he left me. I ran home and told mom that I was robbed. Of course, I was too scared and too much in the closet to tell her the gory details. My father launched a police complaint. But as expected nothing happened. I was scared to travel alone for a long long time. I changed my route, and my mode of transport. It took me many many years to wake up

Later, many years later, I heard several similar stories from my friends. Many with gory outcomes. Newspapers in Mumbai had reported the murder of a BARC scientist, and though not proven, they suspected gay extortion to be a reason. Similarly there has been a similar case in Lokhandwala, Mumbai that I have heard of. And several such mishaps have befallen my gay friends. They have been mugged and molested, but what's most scary is the fact that these incidents have shattered their confidence and they now trust no body. One of them, was deep in the closet, and contemplated suicide. It took several discussions and meetings with other gay men to actually get him to regain his feet.

It is important to be cautious, at 30ish now; it'd be a blatant white lie if I'd say that I have not had flings. But anytime that I am out on an aphrodisiacal expedition, I ensure that at least one friend of mine is in the know of my whereabouts. And of course, I don't carry much cash, no credit/debit cards and no costly ornaments.

It is important, so that we are a strong community with many friends so that we can fall back on someone or the other for help. And yeah, it is important that we speak up and if we can, report such cases.



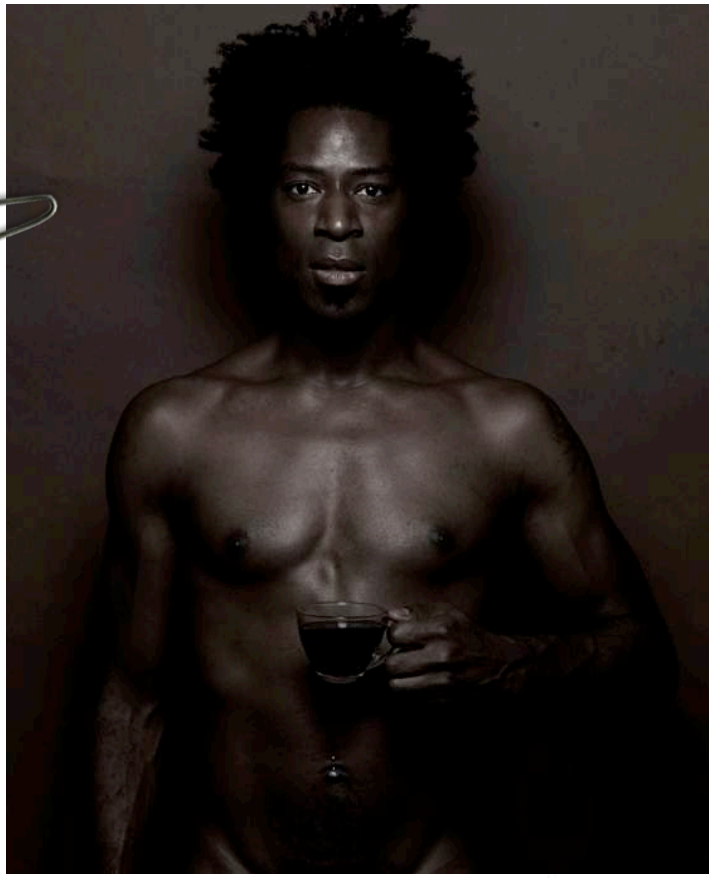
And Now, A Film On This Issue

A positive step forward, is a film that's coming up. Onir's film "I AM" is an ensemble of 4 stories knitted together with the common thread of fear. Of these 4 stories, "I AM OMAR" uncovers the nexus between the police and male commercial sex workers. Played by the talented Arjun Mathur and Rahul Bose, this film should be added to your must-watch list. The latest update from Onir is that "I AM" would be releasing sometime in the month of July-August 2010.

You wish to do something about this issue, silently? well, you could also be a part of this film which truly intends to make a difference. I AM is a crowd-sourced film. Onir invites you to "co-own" the film by contributing as less as Rs. 1000. The film already has some 400 co owners and producers spread across countries and continents. Details of the same could be sought at www.iamthefilms.com

"Today, I was fired for being a faggot…"

DIEPIRIYE KUKU



Today I was fired for being a faggot. Midday, April 2009. A call arrived on my mobile phone during lunch and instructed me to see the middle school principal. I had been a substitute teacher at the American School here in Delhi for several years, beginning with an initiative that I started as a resource educator for Black History Month in February 2005. Africa and African-American parents I knew outside of the school regularly expressed concern that the school celebrated multi-culturalism through a pan-Asian food fare and otherwise provided no real meaningful classroom support for dealing with social difference. I was just in the library editing some papers, which is near the office. So I arrived in the principal's office in moments. For years, I had expected this day, so my cool temperament really threw the principal off her game. She even tried to throw me through several digs, complaining that in one instance I had not precisely followed the absent teacher's instructions. Often teachers don't leave clear instructions, if any, I explained, and had consistently been lauded by teachers and students for helping to make the subject matter more real to the kids. Anyhow, this part of the firing all came as fodder to justify and support her trump card: I had spoken about homosexuality during a class.

As the principal's lips continued to move, I was taken back to 1987 back in Kentucky, and the sheer oppressiveness of the silence around diversity in general. It was my seventh grade, and one classmate accused me of looking at our gym teacher's butt. Having learned no words to speak about this injurious stigmatization, I used my fists. That girl beat my ass. We were separated and sent to the principal's office, a man that had known me, and these conflicts since second grade. Nonetheless, we had to explain ourselves to him, and as an adult I can say that it must have been crystal clear to the principal that he was dealing with a young person struggling to understand his sexuality. The punishment we received was more sympathetic than harsh. Still, no guidance was offered. I grew up terrified in middle school; I turned in on myself as it became apparent that the secret I held was nasty. My own middle school principal silenced everything homosexual in the same way that this principal was enforcing such silence today by kicking me out of that so-called liberal and progressive educational environment. It didn't matter to her that one of her students called me a

As the principal's lips continued to move, I was taken back to 1987 back in Kentucky, and the sheer oppressiveness of the silence around diversity in general. It was my seventh grade, and one classmate accused me of looking at our gym teacher's butt.

"Fag," and that I had used a portion of the class to facilitate a discussion where the young people spoke about how to include people who may feel on the margins in their school. The kids did more of the work of inclusion than the school's curricula, which has a token sprinkling of color, yet is otherwise quite sanitized of reality.

The trouble began 10 days earlier when I received threatening comments on a video uploaded to my YouTube channel where I discuss similarities between queer life in Africa and India. Before quickly deleting his/her user account, Rhubaru wrote: 'This thing (woman?) teaches at a school a friend of mine goes to, it's disgusting. He teaches at one of the top schools on Earth and he's not goddamn fired yet. FORTUNATELY these videos have started to circulate around the staff and parent of the students. I'd only give him a couple of days left at the place. It's really really gross. I don't think my parents would even let me go to a school with staff like that. Not a suitable thing for children to see, especially middle school students.' On another selection of my videos, Rhubaru left the blunt comment: 'You disgust me.' When firing me, the middle school principal quoted Rhubaru's comments as evidence of my immorality. She suggested that I had encouraged kids to visit my channel, based on this another video where I use many curse words to create a comedic play about how my second grade teacher assigned me a nickname on the first day of school. My first grade teacher, another middle-class liberal white woman, never learned to say my name! This was a practice so common at the American School today that once when a Korean student acted out violently in class, none of the other teachers could help me to identify him since they only knew him by the Anglicized name he was politely and gently forced to adopt in the so-called multi-kulti school. Ironically, the initial video in question was not uploaded to my YouTube account, but to a net community to which I belong, and it discussed a specific issue that I faced as a kid, which is an extreme issue at this school. Another middle school parent made me aware that her daughter had found the video and warned me that it had gone viral amount the students. She cautioned me that the school was far too socially conservative for her European tastes and that she had planned to remove her kids as soon as possible.

We can feign commitments to education and flaunt our secular values, while never sincerely confronting difference and therefore engaging in "subject to subject" talk with the 'other'. How could we, when folks like me are simply removed like stains.

Overall, this experience has reminded me that some people really do see me, hear what I am saying, but only hear an angry negro, because that is indeed all that they are prepared to see. People often ignore what oppression is like. We distance ourselves from the brutal terrorism of the earlier parts of our history, culminating in non-violent resistance. In America, we forget that our culture was born out of domination and absorbing difference into sameness, rather than ever genuinely celebrating our socio-religious and ethnic diversity, regional brilliance and potential for interaction. We live separated along gender, race and class, and thereby are never made accountable for our rhetoric. We can feign commitments to education and flaunt our secular values, while never sincerely confronting difference and therefore engaging in "subject to subject" talk with the 'other'. How could we, when folks like me are simply removed like stains. My circumstances here reminded me more of the abandonment I had felt by the education system that failed to protect me from regular harassment as a kid, and refused to even acknowledge my difference, save for the innuendoes and quiet conversations years after high-school graduation with retired teachers who always meant well.

Today, I was fired from a job and accused of inappropriately behaving with kids. Instead of forgetting, I remembered how as a child I longed for someone to help me understand my difference, to assist me in processing the taunting, harassment and abuse that terrorized me throughout my youth as an effeminate boy, and I continue to sift through the residue. Where were the gay teachers? I had met one, and years later thanked him for showing up at school every now and then. He never breeched the subject with me, but it was his pride that shined through. As much as schools work to reinforce a heteronormative environment under the guise of safety and 'appropriateness', a modern world must make concerted efforts to cultivate diversity, to teach peace through dialogue, and never shy away when confronted with alterity. The American School's middle school leadership in question here has regularly put students' lives through her fear-of-the-other. Black youth, and boys in particular, have expressed to me several ways in which they emotionally feel unsafe at this school and are usually too few in number to perceive of their collective stereotyping-at this age they take it personally.

Much like the weekend Korean language courses at the school organized by Korean parents targeting young Koreans growing up outside their home environment,

Black parents both in America and certainly at this school must manage to pick up the pieces and heavily supplement the book learning if ever their kids are to develop a healthy self-image. Korean and other East Asian students are the second largest visible ethnic cluster among the schools student population. Students have told me that they suffer the same sort of homogenizing force of oppression, the tacit assumption that everybody wants to be white and elite, though their families are numerous and inter-connected enough to form a refuge. Many of the American expatriates may even begin to use the terms 'white' and 'western' interchangeably, though I suspect that electing the first president of color will give many permission to come out from under the cloak of political correctness. Moreover, teachers do not bother learning their names, for example, and liberally suggest Anglicized nicknames. Likely the teachers have the best intention of integrating the kids into the fold. It's radical to think that educated adults are unaware of the respect demonstrated by just paying enough attention to learn to properly pronounce an individual's name. By those standards, it's easy to see how individuality is discouraged while maintaining the façade of plurality. Yet as the old saying goes: Last hired, first fired. In the age where money talks, Rhubaru's folks apparently yield a great wand than most, as the school is indelibly linked to the American Embassy and its socio-political whims. Yet, instead of being their fall guy, I follow my own example set in middle school when I first became aware that such targeted discrimination would follow me: Pray for the other's happiness for they know not how much they damage their own karma with such displays of moral drawback and pestilence. Most of all, we must speak out. Silence is the virtual key to our continued exploitation, and fear its fulcrum. Hence, the courage to love ourselves and a healthy self-esteem is always the answer. As queer people, it is our responsibility to speak up and speak out. Whether you reach out to a friend, or extend your words to masses, know that none of us are alone. By speaking about, we build a consensus of love and respect against the quiet tide of heterosexual panic.

Me Lord, I object!

AHANA BANNERJIE

I don't know whether I should be writing this. It might seem like I am complaining about it, but I have no option left other than to write about it. Iam a transsexual. I cannot help it. I am still in my transition. I can be happy about the fact that things are working out for me. But I'm not selfish enough to turn my back on those individuals who are unfortunate enough to not yet discover all the facts about the procedures of sexual transition, or are yet to come to terms with their gender identity, or even have the courage and the means to disclose the full facts about their truth to their parents and loved ones.

So here I am, writing this article and getting on with what I want to talk about.

In popular discourse we keep referring to the rights of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgenders, or in other words, LGBT rights. But how true is this supposed inclusive appellation? Should I just say an "Oops" and rephrase myself to just "GL" rights? Do "rights" in this sexual rights activism really operate beyond the 'Rights of Gays and Lesbians'?

Since the early days of the fight for the rights of the sexual minority community, did anyone really care how things would be after we are granted permission to live legally as humans? I don't think so. Everyone from social workers to lay sympathizer activists went out of their way to reach the 'Hijras' to garner support for their 'demands'. Although I still do not fully understand what these 'demands' really are, or what they actually mean.

The Hijra community is not made up of a homogeneous group of individuals. There is diversity within it. Many in the Hijra community are crossdressing males that is males who wear female attire. Some are castrated males, that is they have surgically had their male genitals removed, but have not had a reconstructive surgery to have an artificial vagina created in its place. Some are "shemales", that is essentially they are homosexual men who have had a surgery to create breasts like females by way of silicone implants, and even sometimes to change the appearance of their face to look feminine and who regularly crossdress, while retaining the male genitals that they were born with. And finally there are the biological hermaphrodites, people who were born with an undetermined sex or genital.

Many of these divergent groups join the Hijra community for lack of proper employment opportunities, merely as a source of income, for they have to feed their family. Donning make-up like a girl and going out begging with the other hijras it seems is a easy way to make money. Some merely enjoyed crossdressing, and being in the hijra fold gives them the opportunity to express themselves without fear or inhibitions. Some actually enjoy physical intimacy with someone else in exchange for money. Many join to earn enough money for their surgical transition from male to female, which is an expensive procedure. Many join the community because they did not find any support in their domestic bases, and being a truant, found a shelter

in the community. Some of these run-aways will ultimately decide to get castrated and live out the rest of their life in the community's service.

Given this diversity, we can safely say that the Hijra community comprises of hermaphrodites, transsexuals, transvestites, and transgendered persons. Certainly not all Hijras are transsexuals. A transsexual is different. He/she can be a referred as gay or lesbian person in the initial stages of the life prior to surgery, especially if that person's primary sexual and emotional affectation is with a person of his/her biological sex. A transsexual, irrespective of whether he/she has the support of his/her family, will go for hormones therapy and take the necessary steps to surgically alter the body to their opposite sex. The primary urge is to change their physical image as recognized in public into something which is in conformity with their self perception.

Usually most of us transsexuals are educated, have the means to live life on our own terms, and are often accepted by our families. I don't have anything against the Hijra community, but people should try to understand the clear distinctions within the Hijra community and outside, and stop painting everyone with the same brush. A lot of transsexuals do not consciously join the Hijra community, and equating the two may not be correct. Many male-to-female transsexuals would ideally like to live life post-surgery, as a regular woman in society, may be get married to a man, and adopt kids and raise them like your average family.

Post legalization of gay sex, life has been too good for many people in the queer community. Gays and lesbians started getting social acceptance and permissions from their guardians to live together with their partners, not to speak of a sense of belonging from their peers. Today, they can live the way they like and feel protected from discrimination. They can seek the help of the laws of the state as well as the police, if they are bothered unnecessarily. Needless to say, the same is largely true with people who identify as 'Bisexuals'.

The reason is not far to seek. Most queer people are not distinguishable from the general public. It's not easy to specially recognize their lot as something different. They don't have any special characteristic and because most sexual activity is a private matter, can hardly be seen to be doing anything different publicly. I do not grudge them this social anonymity, but I have to acknowledge that this anonymity, or shall I call it invisibility is the basic truth, which shields them from a lot of discrimination and prejudice!

By contrast, every time the gender role that society expects from a person is not adhered to, it is a public manifestation that challenges social norms, and raises social opposition. Obviously this leads to discrimination, sometimes even violence. One easy form of this discrimination is the labeling by one name 'Hijra', often used derogatively, to every gender variant person, be they transgender, transsexual, or transvestite.

Every time the gender role that society expects from a person is not adhered to, it is a public manifestation that challenges social norms, and raises social opposition. Obviously this leads to discrimination, sometimes even violence.

In this rather confusing and complex scene, my question is, where are our rights as transsexuals, in midst of other sub-communities of queer people? We transsexuals have long stood side by side with other queer groups and fought for our rights, but today do we really have a place at the table? Why do we continue to feel that we have been used whenever the need arose, but are actually abused? Why do even the queer people marginalize us?

Nothing changed for us. It's all the same. We are still struggling for recognition, within and outside the queer community. If we do not put on make-up, we are labeled as effeminate gays. When we don make-up and go out, we are called crossdressers, allegedly someone fraudulently living like women but are actually men. Everyone in society, including members of our own queer community ridicule us, wherever we go. Things are still the same for us.

It was a month ago, that I went back and visited my cousins in New Delhi. What I had left there when I left Delhi, I found in the same state when I went back. People did grow up, and had started accepting homosexuals, but only those homosexuals who do not live dressed in salwar suits, or skirts or frocks and who do not wear make-up. I went back to the Sarojini Nagar market, and there too, the same people who used to pass lewd comments at me years ago, commented and eve-teased me once again.

So how has the Delhi High Court's judgment on section 377 really changed anything for me? Where are my rights as a transsexual person?

Ashamed to be a lesbian? Not any more!

Priya

There was just something that did not click. I had gone out with plenty of guys and began dating at a rather young age. It was never difficult to find boyfriends. But there was still something amiss. Either he didn't like me too much or I did not. I am a rather old school lover. All this open relationship jazz doesn't work for me. A relationship means a relationship.

Since I first began making friends, I have always been a girl's girl. Not only do I get along with women fabulously, I get them and they get me. My best friends have always been women – I especially love older women. Somehow I never fit in with the guys and this used to bother me first but then it suited me perfectly well.

A few years ago I began questioning myself. The more I questioned, the more it seemed to fit in. I swung the other way! And how! My friends had always known my affairs with the opposite sex and they almost ridiculed me at the beginning when I came out to them. But soon they realized I was serious and began supporting my decision.

Coming out to my sister was perhaps the best thing that ever happened to me. The alcohol did make it easier. But when she said, "You thought I was going to judge you for being gay? Don't you know me at all?" and she hugged me. It remains the best decision I have made in my entire life.

Lesbians in India are a lot more visible today. While gay men can be found in movies, plays, books, theatres - mostly in characters that stereotype them. But they are still out there! The same just cannot be said about lesbians. Women in our country are expected to follow a certain code of conduct, ethics and morals. (While the men can go around molesting, raping and taking advantage of women). For women it starts with being a good daughter, then good wife, good mother, good daughter in law and the list is endless. A woman becomes just a co-dependent being in this entire

scenario without any outlet for her feelings, desires and individuality.

And that is why coming out assumes a much greater role in the life of an Indian lesbian. Standing up and telling the world 'this is who I am and accept me' gives a sense of unparalleled joy which you can never find in the closet. The more visible we are, the easier it will be for others like us to have the courage to be out there. The closet provides warmth and comfort but when the temperature rises it will only make you claustrophobic and uneasy.

We live in the age of digital media and information. A large percentage of parents and the older generations in the urban setting are aware of the LGTB phenomenon. These discussions have finally come to dinner tables. This is yet another positive sign for many of us who are still not out. It might not be easy but it certainly isn't that tough. Indian parents might surprise you sometimes. Be out and be proud! You aren't alone.

The world of Tabiness:

Straight girl in a Gay world...well almost!

Tabitha T.

The due credit for the title of this one goes to a very dear friend whose nickname would spell up to the word 'ass'... You know who you are dahlin...

I am your regular 22 year old (WTF.. Who am I tryin to kid???) and life was cruising along its predetermined charming route for me.. There weren't too ups and downs (yeah, right!!!) and I liked life the way it was (Nahiiiiiiiiiiiiiii...)

Given the fact that that there were so many brackets and so many expressions to all that I just mentioned in the above given romantic statement, I knew that things had to be set 'straight'... Something wasn't right with the way I was feeling... I constantly felt the urge to be around people who understood me...

I walked into a club one day, and I bumped into a dear old acquaintance... Angela (Lets call her that... Not like there is too much of an identity to be protected on that one) was thrilled to see me after so long... And let me be honest, it wasn't that bad having her around.. She was always fun to dance with, given the fact that she is as bindaas as she is...

We danced and danced and danced some more, and through all this dancing, we had been scouring the crowd for any decent looking men... But alas, that wasn't to be...

Me to Angela: "See, now this is exactly why I believe in the saying 'All good looking men are either married, dead or gay'."

We seemed to agree on this one, as we had a ball laughing about the same joke for about 15 whole minutes... But I have to also agree on one more ground, we did manage to garner a lot of attention, because we did make for quite a sight... Two chicks.. Grinding.. Dirty dancing...

What happened next was a matter of luck, if I may say so.. I don't think we intended it to happen.. But it did... In a matter to spur on the audience that we had already created, we started getting steamier.. And within a matter of a few minutes, all you could hear was 'gasps' and 'wows'... Both Angela and I opened our eyes and looked around.. The whole club had gone into a standstill... And we both looked at each other..

Had it really happened?

Did we really do what we think we did?

Did we both, two full blown heterosexual chicks, just kiss?

Ooooooohhh baby.. If I was watching us, even I would be turned on.. Two full bodied women (read 'extremely busty') lip locked and unaware of the audience and the world around them... So caught up in a steamy passionate kiss that lasted for a good 10 mins (as the audience told us)...

Whoooooooooo... (wipes sweat off brow)

And that's the day I realized, maybe just maybe, it was time for me to pass the baton on from being 'bi-curious' to being 'bisexual'...

How now was I supposed to get to know more people, who would not only accept me for who I was, but also encourage me to meet the right kind of people? That's when my knight in shining armor came along.. Another gem of a person. Let's call him Joel for now. (This one does have an identity to be protected) Joel walked into my life during this extremely turbulent phase of me accepting the 'truth' bout myself.. And before you knew it, I was on my way to my first ever LGBT party!

On entering the club, I was zapped... I had never seen so many men together in a place... Never ever... Never never ever... And you know what made it so much better?? They were all so HAWTTTTTTTTTTTT!!!!!

I looked around in amazement and went 'Hot Hot Hot Hot Hot Hot Hot' and Joel went 'Yeah hun.. But sorry to break your heart... It's more like Gay Gay Gay Gay Gay Gay...'

Oopsie.. Life was being unfair again... But what the heck, at least the music was a saving grace... Once I hit the dance floor I didn't care about the rest of the world.. I was in my own world... I absolutely fell in love with Joel's friends.. They are the munchaliciousest (If that's even a word) bunch of boys I have seen around town...

I ran ova to Joey like a bubbly over-excited teenager and narrated the story to him.. And much to my relief, he assured me that there were loadsa bisexuals around and that I should keep my eye out for 'em.. He told me some of them were 'golden catches' if I managed to hitch' em!!!

We boogied our asses off for a while, before I had to stop for a 'drink' break.. I needed to drink some water. My throat was parched from all the dancing.. I walked over to the bar. All the guys seemed friendly. They smiled at me as I passed 'em...

That's when the most unlikely thing (or what I deemed unlikely at that point) happened... Someone pinched my bottom.. I turned around to face the culprit, assuming I was going to face Joel or one of his cute gay friends..

To my delight, I am faced with a totally different face. He's cute. And he's smiling. And he's the culprit. Which means he likes my ass. Which means he either likes women, or he thinks I look manly (well, that would've hurt my ego for life)... But apparently, it was option no. 1 he went for.. He liked women...

What was he doing there then, you ask? Read 'Bisexual'... He identified with me and me with him..

I got talking, danced a li'l... But I was too scared to exchange numbers... After all, I was a noob to the whole LGBT deal... I ran ova to Joey like a bubbly over-excited teenager and narrated the story to him.. And much to my relief, he assured me that there were loadsa bisexuals around and that I should keep my eye out for 'em.. He told me some of them were 'golden catches' if I managed to hitch' em!!! Ooooooooooooo... Finally some good news...

As I was scouring around, my eyes landed on a guy.. He was typical TDH material (tall, dark, handsome.. DUH!!!) and he danced like he could burn the dance floor with every move... I couldn't see his face clearly from the distance. So I started moving closer...

OH MY GODDDDDDDDDD!!!! It's kinda embarrassing to mention this here.. But he turned out to be a guy I was trying to hit on when I had met him at another straight club and he had given me a smile and not taken things further which had pissed me off. And it was only today that I realized why he didn't take it further.. Coz the poor guy just couldn't go further with a woman.. LOL..!

Our eyes met.. I didn't think he would recognize me.. But he did.. We looked at each other. And we both burst out laughing... He was the first one to move into the hug and that hug lasted for a long time... We took a break from dancing and moved to a quieter corner to talk (that was all we could do, remember!!!)

And that my friends, is the story of how I made the transition from BI-CURIOUS to BI-SEXUAL...and I'd surely say 'Phew! What a relief'!

A Himalayan Treat

Shiva Prasad

In our family we have an international travel a year, but this big recession thing had its impact on our little household too, so it was decided against it. But for me my travel is a must, I recuperate and rejuvenate for the entire year through my annual trip. So, I started thinking of a more economic option. Nepal struck my mind. I was also intrigued by the LGBT liberation movement in Nepal making headlines for the past few months. I discussed this with my gay cousin and we froze on the destination and convinced our families.

Moving into Nepal was my first experience of literally crossing the border. We reached Gorakhpur (the closest railway station to the India-Nepal border) by train and headed to Shonauli in an auto rickshaw. Unlike what I expected the situation at the border was quite relaxed and the military deployment was just a troop on either side and the checking was quite nominal. Indians don't need a visa or any other permit to cross the border. Then we were shuttled by our tour agency to Kathmandu in a bus. The ride in itself was so rejoicing with the landscape changing form plain to mountains, deep valleys, lush greenery, munching dead cheap succulent and fresh green apples on our way and the locals acting as our tour guides.

We reached the capital city at around 6 o clock in the evening, but it was already dark by then and it was biting cold back then in October. We were lodged in a very comfortable boutique hotel in Thamel (the tourist district of Kathmandu). We relaxed that night and followed the tour agency's city site seeing itinerary the next day.

First we went to the famous Pashupatinath temple, did our darshan, bought different varieties of rudraksh and other religious stuff for our extended family. Next was the Buddhist shrine of Swayambunath. Both temples we quite imposing, but the worst part was being bare foot(our soles we almost freezing) in the queue during the darshan.

After the holy places were the royal palace, the parliament and other less important government and historical structures. It was a pleasant misty foggy morning. The traffic was bad but regulated. One strange notice that i made was that I spotted more mercedes in Kathmandu than in any other Indian city. We had our lunch and were dropped at the darbar square for our shopping. The ambiance of the darbar square was quite colonial, oriental and at the same time modestly modern with a few shopping malls. The things worth buying were the antique pieces, masks, shawls, quilts and lots of smuggled branded goods. We made some best buys at the free markets. I realized soon enough that almost all people were amazingly in shape contrary to back home, beautiful with smooth light skins and silky hair and fashionably dressed.

Travel Guide

TRAVEL SERVICES:

Pink Mountain travels and tours is Nepal's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender focused travels and tours agency based in Kathmandu. Visit www.pinkyatra.com for more information.

HANGOUTS:

Maya
Thamel, 441-0371. Cocktail bar frequented by gay people.
Café Mitra
Thamel (near Hotel Pisang/ Tara Guest House), (977-1) 425-9015. Popular with expat gays. Service is gay-friendly, prices are above average. Interiors definitely has the queer eye.

EAT OUTS:

Jatra Restaurant and Bar- J. P. Rd, Thamel, 421-1010. Live music.
Oriental Dynasty Restaurant- Darbar Marg, 422-2515. Open 24-hours.
Ying Yang (Thai)- Thamel, 442-5510.

Nepal has something for every kind of traveler, including the gay one. You may be single, going with your better half or for some food for your soul, you will not be disappointed. Forget home, soak in the colors, the wild Himalayas, picture post card sceneries and beautiful, friendly people. You would carry home memories for a life time.

We finished our shopping at around 9 (shops close very early in winters) and headed back to our hotel. Had our dinner and went for a late night walk. The roads bore a festive look, hundreds of tourists of different nationalities were heading towards different bars , pubs, street games etc. the entire district of Thamel was clustered with restaurants, discotheques and chic pubs. There were posters of scantily clad women, inviting and lewd one liners by pubs. Not able to withstand the cold we went back to our hotel. We googled and searched for the gay bars there.
The next day was the most exciting. It was our flight around the Mount Everest. It cost us 3800 INR each. Those few moments seeing the magnificient mountain in real were etched in my memorabilia for ever. One would be just so humbled my the majesty of our planet.

Later that day we did some more shopping. In the night we dressed up in our smart clothes and went to a supposedly gay bar. And it was an amazing crowd. Fully packed with chick looking chickna Nepali boys and other foreign guys. The music was electryingfying and people danced non stop till very late in the night. We befriended a gay couple there and they said Nepal has a thriving gay community and night-life scene. Following the introduction of laws offering its transgender, gay and lesbian citizens equality Nepal has been "moving ahead full throttle" to establish a colorful and lively environment for its gay populace. Travelers like us are usually in for a surprise when they arrive in this country to find that gay-friendly clubs now dot its capital. This may not be something that is expected from a "conservative, mostly-Hindu" nation, but the issue has been in the spotlight of late. We also discussed the gay cruising places, the NGOs etc, their political, cultural, social struggle.

Our next destination was this beautiful, fairy tale city of Pokhara. All the way along from Kathmandu to Pokhara one has this breathtaking view of the Annapurna ranges. The tourist district of Pokhara is all along the lake Phewa. The city is quaint and calm. All that you have to do there is to just relax and enjoy the bountiful nature. And because it was the last week of the year, the traffic was banned from the streets and all the restaurants were brought out onto the roads. The evening and night scene was even more vibrant than in Thamel. Each restaurant that is brought out onto the road had a bon fire, and many country street games were organized too. People were friendly, celebrating and cheerful. The next few days we went trekking and river rafting.

Travel

Summer Time Fashion

By Ashish

Summer is a great time for fashion both for men and women. After being wrapped up in sweaters, scarves and long sleeved clothes its time to show a little skin. Women are showing off their sexy bodies in fabulous swimsuits and bikinis and Men are starting to unbutton and open up their shirts. Get outside and get some colour so you can start showing off your sexiness. Just show enough skin to get his and her attentions but leaving them begging for more.

With some creative ingenuity, you can transform your summer attire into outdoor chic. Just make sure you are prepared to take full advantage of summer's best offerings by wearing comfortable clothing with a stylish flair. Summer fashion is cool, trendy and vibrant with more accent on colour, prints and rustic style. With an emphasis on fabric, denim, tailoring, and patterns, this summer is all about being simple, getting colourful, looking relaxed, and going out in style.

Prints and Colours

Bold monochrome prints and big aggressive prints produce a fashionable look. Smaller floral prints are elegant for formal dressing.

Richer jewel tones are the hues conforming to today's trend. Electric blue, stronger tones of sky blue, gold, silver, golden apricot, yellow, tangerine, coral, scarlet red, purple, cobalt blue, ultramarine, emerald sea green, and hot bright pink and other colours with a metallic tinge are trendy this summer.

Texture

while cotton is the texture of the season, materials that glimmer and shimmer with sheen are fashionable and are intended to wear during the day. But if they seem to be a bit prickly due to the beating rays of the sun, use them as trims in your clothes to conform to trend.

Fashion for the fairer sex have more options to opt for, the ranges and varieties are immense unlike the men's fashion. Still men do have their fashionable part for this colourful season. This is the time to try out cool and bright colours, play with textures and bright prints. Shorts and skirts are in! Skirts are in with different styles, prints and fabrics. For those who have long legs go in for mini skirts and wrap around skirts and flaunt those sexy legs. Those who are on the bulkier side can opt for long flowing skirts with floral prints which are trendy and in-vogue. Flaunt your sexy curves on a boyish figure with a body-hugging cut.

For those who love wearing pants, this season is excellent to flaunt your sexy curves with pants to suit your body and

figure. The trend toward eclecticism and femininity is perhaps best expressed this season by one of the season's must-haves - the cargo pant. Capri pants are also in and give the much required comfort and flexibility. Cropped pants and stretch pants in a variety of fabrics is another trend which comes in comfortable fits this spring. Whether your thighs are thick or thin, a loose cut can give you a flattering fit.

Tops

Go in for a camisole top to show off your toned arms and play up your bust. They come in various colours, fabric and styles. Those who have a perfect figure can go in for body hugging cotton tops. In the Indian fashion world kurta's are the in thing this spring. It's also the perfect style to hide tummy bulges and a large chest. Sleeveless, strappy tops are also the best bet this summer which comes in floral and other prints.

T shirts

Funky t shirts are in! Bold retro graphics, bright colours are in for this season. Fabrics like cotton, viscose, acetate would be

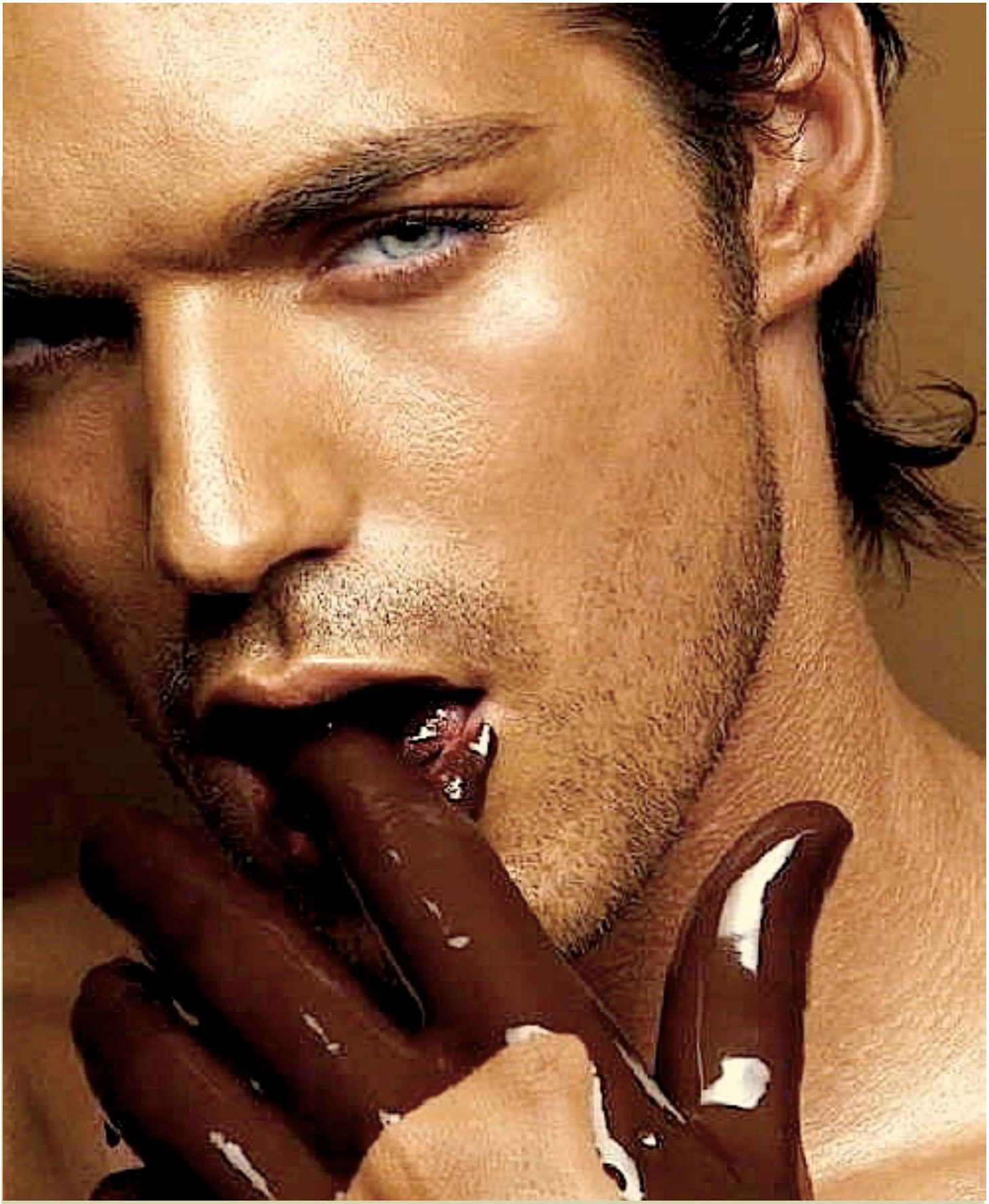
preferably comfortable for this summer.

Accessories

Accessories make a lot of effect on your wardrobe. This spring accessories flirt with colour. Handbags are witty. Sandals are strappy. Jewellery is coral and sun glasses have a tint of shine. All these adds up to a pretty season and a great way to express your individuality.

Shades make a statement when you wear it with the proper dress. They make you look stylish and trendy and cools your eyes!. But you need to look out for one which would suit your face.

Shoes and sandals are colourful this time. With graphics and bold colours this season is full of fun and frolic. Men can try out sandals and flip flops in bright colours to match up their casual clothing. making you look super cool!.



FOOD & DRINK

CHOCOLATE

Godly, dirty 'n sinful

Chocolate is an aphrodisiac and euphoric (This belief was also shared by one of history's most famous lovers, Giacomo Casanova). Chocolate increases the sexual appetite and is responsible for heightened sexual pleasure by way of stimulants like caffeine and theo-bromine and the rush of endorphins, dopamine and serotonin produced by eating chocolates. So, eager to incorporate chocolate in your mating ritual? Here we go.

INGREDIENTS	
Milk Powder	*two cups*
Sugar	*two cups*
Coco powder	*one cup*
Cream	*3 table spoons*
Water	*one cup*

Step one : Powder 2 cups of sugar in a food processor, add 2 cups of milk powder, one cup of cocoa powder and blend it thoroughly.

Step two : Heat one cup of water in a non-stick pan. Add the above mixture in a constant flow while stirring it continuously (you need a little skill here to avoid lumps).

Step three : Add 3 table spoons of cream and stir for three minutes.

Step four : Transfer the above onto a butter coated mould. Refrigerate it for half hour and cut into desired shapes.

NOTE- if you wish to have a chocolate syrup or body paint increase the water (two cups would give u nice thick consistency) used as base.

BEST COCKTAILS

Cosmopolitan

Starting this issue, Pink Pages brings you a series of the best cocktail recipes ever… to be used in full measure for your romantic evening with your special one! We start off with a vodka classic that you can't help but love…

Cosmopolitan Ingredients

1 oz Vodka

1/2 oz Triple Sec

Dash of Lime Juice

1/2 oz Cranberry Juice

Method:

Shake all ingredients with ice and strain into a cocktail glass.

FITNESS

So, it's monsoon time once again, and while it's always such a gay season to bask under the rainbow, our health can take a beating if we're not careful about what we eat and especially drink, and so much else too! Here are some handy tips to beat the bacteria this season.

Avoid street food. The monsoons are definitely not a good time to indulge yourself into that!

Apply a strong insect repellent to keep mosquitoes away and prevent getting bitten. It's also a good idea to take anti-malarial drugs during this time of year, as malaria is at its peak.

We understand that splashing around in puddles is so much fun, but avoid that too. Besides leptospirosis, it can lead to numerous fungal infections of the feet and nails.

And if you don't want your new cardigans to be dotted with dirt, avoid walking around water collected on the streets. Passing cars can do a lot of damage to our beloved fabrics. Dry your feet whenever they get wet.

Avoid colds and coughs by keeping your body warm and dry. Don't enter air conditioned rooms with wet hair and damp clothes.

If you suffer from asthma or diabetes, avoid staying anywhere with damp walls. It promotes the growth of fungus and can be especially harmful.

Drink lots of warming herbal teas, especially those with antibacterial properties.

STDs: What you should know!

Dr. Atul

What are the common symptoms?

Itching, pain and discharge from penis, rectum, vagina and oral cavity, ulcers and warty lesions at same sites. Fever, joint pain, throat pain, fatigue, rash, swollen lymph nodes are not very specific but can be present in acute HIV infection usually weeks to 6 months after exposure. Medical attention should be immediately seeked if above mentioned symptoms are present. Symptomatic patients are just like a tip of iceberg, most of the cases are hidden and can be found only after having proper health awareness and regular health check-ups.

Are there vaccines which can protect me against certain STDs?

Yes! HPV vaccine prevents infection against human papilloma virus and precancerous and cervical cancers. It can also decrease the risk of anal HPV and anal cancer. HBV is over 100 times more infectious than HIV. HBV can be easily prevented by the vaccine and it even provides lifelong immunity against Hepatitis B which causes acute and chronic Hepatitis B infection and increases risk of liver failure and Hepatocellular carcinoma. Hepatitis A can also be prevented by vaccination. It is very important to practice safe sex, because its only way to prevent certain STDs like HIV-AIDS. Don't mix sex with alcohol. It is very important to use lubricants while having anal sex to avoid rupture of condom, lubricants should be aqueous based , oil should not be used because it damages the condom.

What else should I be doing?

It is very important to have regular medical checkups and to screening for common STDs and HIV at regular intervals, say every 6 months. Take immediate medical assistance if you think you have some sexual health problems. It is better if your Doctor knows about your sexuality, but it may not always be a practical option, which is understandable.

INTERIOR (RE)DÉCOR

BY ASHISH

Pink Pages brings to you a varied menu of bedroom, living room, and kitchen variants to suit your individuality, style, and of course your pocket too.

WHAT HAPPENS IN BED

Caters to: The femme damsel!

(top) Girls are very particular about their interiors, especially when it comes to their bedroom. They tend to have a stylish room that can really reflect their exceptional taste. Well, a girl's bedroom is always different and full of many wall hangings, attractive furnishings, stuffed animals and stylish furniture.

Shown here is one of the cutest rooms imaginable for our resident baby dyke. Fill the room with stuffed animals and soft baby-colors and you achieve this remarkably sweet effect. Prefer wall colors that are rich and stylish; always try to mix 'n match shades. Make every effort to **design** your room to suit your needs, your fantasies, and your fairy tales.

Caters to: The neo-modernistic guy who's just got his first paycheck, or the teenager with an eye for style

(bottom) On his return **home** after a day of struggles and social life, what this teen often does is barricades himself in his private quarters and is often not visible until he gets hungry. It is not known what exactly happens during this time. In many cases, loud music can be heard and sometimes lengthy phone conversations with other guys/gals.

A teenager's room is pretty messy generally; often not the purpose of crime, nor is it their fault. Shortage of storage areas and shelves can be managed well and even the cleanliest of teenagers have arrays of school books and clean clothes piled or scattered randomly across the floor. But that's what makes a teenager's room so special – the 'feel'.

Caters to: The elite ones.

(top)The **bedroom** is the most private and intimate part of the house and therefore it has a special place in my heart. It is important to make sure your bedroom is attractive because that's the place you would want to relax after a tiring day at work.

The grey shades are terrific that create the comfort zone. The zebra dice is another point of attraction over here.

A similar type of excitement is there for the rest of the house and in bringing things about it. If we analyze, we find that in deciding the **design** of the **house** or part of the house wall colors, **furniture**, **curtains**, decorative accessories play a very important role. Of these what is wrong, but easily overlooked sometimes, is furniture. People usually pay more attention to the **living room** or drawing room furniture. What they fail to understand is that, as an owner, the room which will play perhaps the most important part in the business mood and personality is the **bedroom**.

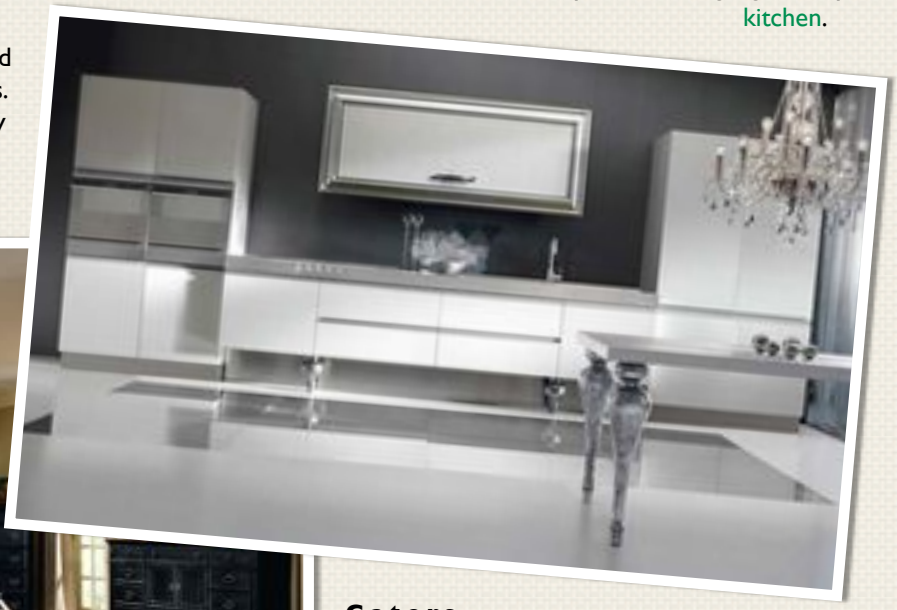
This bedroom with a classic black bed and nightstand delivers the perfect lavishness. The mirror has its own personality reflecting the king-like feel.

KITCHEN KITSCH

Caters to: The Modern Citizens, or the DINK (Double Income No Kids) couple

The **cabinet** is used to store almost everything from pots and pans of food to other **kitchen** accessories. They are the backbone of any kitchen. Modern facilities are becoming popular because it takes up lesser space than the past species. Modern facilities are also known to be less expensive and more owners prefer to have this type of peripherals over any other one. They can add class and elegance to any **kitchen cabinets** and if you have, you can update a few things to look like new.

How **cabinets** are spread is another thing to consider. This can play a huge role in making them look more attractive in the kitchen. With a choice of coverage, their units will certainly be the highlight of your kitchen.



Caters to: The Country-Style lovers

In the **design** of a kitchen, it is important to maintain the basic, functional layout in mind. It is advisable to group the main triangle work, stove, **sink**, and refrigerator all together. This will help a person to save time in the kitchen.

It is also useful to invest in larger, deeper immersion sinks. This helps to avoid spraying water outside the sink when washing particularly large utensils and containers. It is also important to have a walkway leading to the **sink** taps for hot water.

Caters to: The wood lovers

You can select kitchens which occupy less space and have more storage space or a separate **kitchen** cupboard that can be easily moved and taken anywhere with you.

Caters to: The pastel hue fans

Introducing color to your **kitchen!** Get creative with a lick of paint in the kitchen, but be warned: reds and oranges stimulate and increase appetite, while blue will curb your hunger.

Caters not: The Common Man

Antiques are objects that have more value because of their age, pieces of furniture or handicraft revered for its creativity, splendor and period of origin. **Antique furniture** is often considered priceless because of its exquisiteness.

These **antique pieces** are generally very expensive and not affordable by the common man. They are found in exquisite shops dealing only with such ancient, **vintage furniture**. They are found in up-market places in cities, or at your nearest flea market. Beware of fake antiques, though those who just care about the look rather than the authenticity (consequently quality) can surely pick up some cheap imitations from chor bazaars around town.

Apart from the antique and bohemian décor, here comes the modern and contemporary feel.

Homes with children and pets need to have healthy and functional furniture that is easy to maintain. Often, furniture chosen to enhance the **décor** of living rooms includes **couches**, loveseats, recliners, **coffee tables**, entertainment centers, pianos and other useful or decorative items. The living room also features the best pictures and art work in the **house** as well as other accessories such as lights, **carpets** and a decorative lighting field.

This architect developed a poet house where he could read, write and think. High walls are raised to set up a box open to the sky like a naked, metaphysical garden with concrete walls and floor. To create an interior world, leafy trees can be planted in the ground.

Caters to: Youngistan

The world is rapidly modernizing because we the youth are. And so are our needs, which reflects in the choice of our lifestyles.

Modern sofas can be wider or deeper, leather or fabric, with removable or hard cover. Mattresses may be normal or luxury. A modern sofa is always nice to have, especially the kind of furnishings that were in and out of the market. It is always nice to be on the trendier side and going for bolder contrast colors. Chuck pastels and subtle hues; bright colors are here to stay. But don't make it into a rainbow room! Neutralise it with some black and white. Red is in this season.

This red sofa and the arm chairs together create a very pleasing look that is basically to attract the younger generation of today.

This modern living room portrays the color and sense of humor that seems to be in this space. The sloppy and cozy Cocoa-couches add contrast to the room. The red ground rug gives more color to the look. While the abstract paintings give the room the semi- bohemian cum hep-modernistic touch, the white walls provide a soothing base.

GAYTECH'S

GAGETSS

By Gandhi

HTC EVO 4G

HTC EVO is no doubt one the most anticipated phones this year. Finally 4G enabled phones have become a reality. Obviously this kind of a phone has very different type of expectations surrounding it. Overall this phone is a little bulky, though HTC has tried to keep it as slim as possible. It runs on Android 2.1 which was launched as open source software by Google, with a 4.3-inch capacitive touch screen that's totally mesmerizing. It supports a pinch-to-zoom gesture on most of it apps. Another benefit of the large display is a spacious keyboard that rivals the iPhone's in ease of use. Even in portrait mode, we were able to quickly punch out a message with both thumbs. It also comes with an HDMI connector; mind this that it's a D type connector so you will have to buy a converter to connect it to you TV. It has two cameras-one is 1.3 Mpx and the other is 8Mpx with excellent quality, and it also takes videos in 720p. It is equipped with a 1GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon QSD8650 processor and 512MB RAM, thus making the apps pretty smooth.

The battery backup ratings are not yet officially declared so we can't compare on those but I can say that with a decent usage of internet on 4G the battery lasts for 12hrs. It comes with additional features of Android 2.1 such as Google Maps and live wallpapers. The Mail App has also been tweaked a little. Overall I will say the phone's functionality is crisp and good.

MOTOROLA DROID

Finally the Motorola gets down to the market with a phone running on open source software Android 2.0. Trying to give a tough completion to iPhone 3Gs, I must say, and not a bad try at all. It is little thicker than an iPhone but since it has a slider keyboard a couple of mm's here and there is not that bad. This phone is very fast as compared to other Android phones.

Though in the first look it might appear as a box due to its edges buts it's a smartphone. And with the 3.7 inches gorgeous WVGA display, it surpasses even the iPhone. The capacitive display's touch interface is quick and responsive and we love the added multi-

touch capability. The keyboard does have keys which are a little small; keys are squashed next to each other, which makes it difficult to text quickly or by feel. The keyboard has been rearranged by Google to facilitate faster typing. It has a 5MPix Camera with dual LED flash. It also provides a 3.5mm headphone jack, which is compatible with all types of earphones.

SAMSUNG 3D LED

Things have come to life with the new Samsung 3D LED TV. The company brought this product out in the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) and the crowd went woohoo!! This home entertainment package does look luring but does not come cheap.

What's on offer here is a TV that does its own 2D to 3D conversion, and transmits to a pair of shutter glasses. One pair each of these glasses are available with each purchase, they come with a USB connector for charging.

The tough part is how this actually works. The main part is done by the processor which processes the 3D image generating a right eye view and a left eye view. Rest all is left to the shutter glasses. Now these glasses are made of lenses with tiny-tiny shutters which refresh the image in each view corresponding to the refresh rate, thus tricking the brain into visualizing a 3D image (These are quite different from what we use in the theatres). Now the problem which many of us face is the constant flicker of the glasses, slowly you get used to it. Though the output is great but it sometimes gets a little queasy. 3D technology has been included in all the segments including LED, LCD, and Plasma.

Now, A lot of people don't know exactly what an LED TV is. Let me clear your doubts. First of all it does not use LED to display image. It's a normal LCD screen with LED used as a backlight instead of a CCFL type lighting. This reduces its size to a half a inch and power consumption by 20-30%.

With the launch of the 3D TV Samsung also launched its internet connectivity to the televisions so as to facilitate streaming videos directly on the screen. Side by side it has launched its new AppStore same as apple, where you can buy or get free Apps for the televisions. Samsung has also allied with Dream works Animation and Technicolor on promoting content for 3D home entertainment.

For now its time to "TURN ON TOMORROW"

Books

Quarantine

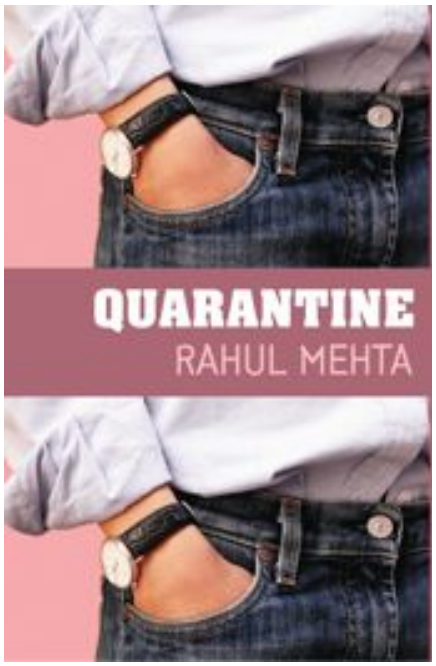
By Rahul Mehta

Udayan

Given the current state of gay Indian fiction, or Indian-American fiction for that matter (barring a few exceptions like Jhumpa Lahiri) one couldn't really blame me for my initial inhibitions about this book. But read this book without prejudices and you'll discover a new sun rising on the horizon of gay fiction. Rahul Mehta may not have broken clichés or stereotypes with his collection of short stories, mostly about Indian American gay men getting lost in the labyrinth of sexuality, race and immigrant dreams; however the fresh rush of literary adrenal that the stories inspire is worth the warm welcome.

The central figure is always the Indian American gay man with the stereotypical rags to riches story of their immigrant families, but the questions of fidelity and relationships differ with stories and their varying geographies and circumstances. 'Quarantine' describes the lifelong difficulty of the narrator to match a cord with his grandfather which culminates in a coming out that no one could have imagined. 'Floating' is an interesting case study of a gay man in small town India- often brushed aside by the city-bred gay folks, and living a life of uncertain anonymity in his own niche. 'Ten thousand years' delves into the questions of fidelity, and how physical or emotional proximity is relative when it comes to individual perceptions of commitment. 'Yours' is a non-judgmental narrative about a couple and a third person who casts a perpetual specter on the relationship.

I especially liked 'The Better Person' that beautifully traces the complexity of relationships, and ideas of fidelity. A conversation that the narrator has with his mother discusses interesting aspects of gender roles in same-sex relationships. Another gem of a story is 'A Better Life' where the gay son of a rich Indian family tries hard to hide his sexuality and his failure in realms beyond the sexual. But as he cruises strip clubs in uptown New York, are his family and friends really insulated from the truth?



The stories are endearing because of the routineness associated with being gay, even in cases of Indian households. However, it may often seem that Mehta might have desisted himself from moving beyond the comfort zone of the second generation Indian-American twentyish gay man with a white boyfriend. Perhaps a coming of age story of a teenager, or a growing old story of a forty-something guy would have done away with such speculations. But inspite of that, for what it's worth, Quarantine is most definitely a literary arrival that just can't be ignored.

Rubyfruit Jungle

By Rita Mae Brown

Ananya Dhote

"Why does everyone have to put you in a box and nail the lid on it? I don't know what I am—polymorphous and perverse. Shit. I don't even know if I'm white. I'm me. That's all I am and all I want to be. Do I have to be something?"

Now, this got me hooked! The above lines script a struggle for personal and professional freedom between two worlds, rural Pennsylvania and glitzy streets of Florida and New York. Rubyfruit Jungle, authored by Rita Mae Brown is post-stonewall, autobiographical lesbian fiction that draws out the life of a woman who comes of age as a lesbian and an aspiring artist in the mid-twentieth century.

Molly Bolt, the lesbian protagonist, could be just another young girl of seven, living with her adoptive parents in poor rural Coffee Hollow, Pennsylvania. But strokes of individuality distinguish her from the rest. Intelligent and ambitious, she defies the so-called ladylike stereotypes, goes around playing 'the doctor' with her dim-witted cousin Leroy and couldn't care less when her adoptive mother, Carrie tells her that she was born a bastard. However, Molly enjoys a beautiful relationship with her father Carl, who is always supporting. In the sixth grade, she develops a crush on a female classmate and has her first homosexual experience. Soon after, her family moves to Florida to look for work. As time

moves along, Molly stands up for herself in myriad of situations, unapologetic of her difference and uncomplaining of the problems.

The story works on many levels, the foremost being personal. It's easy to identify with Molly as a young gay woman growing into her sexuality. Her mother's disapproval of her orientation and manners, estrangement of friends because of being lesbian, being outed by classmates and annulment of college scholarship because of her so-called moral turpitude; such feelings are just too familiar. Her short lived affairs with women and confrontations with hypocritical people can rattle your memory to throw up similar situations. Symbolically, beyond the evident theme of sexuality, it's the story of 'a woman in a man's world'. Clichéd as it may sound; but an independent woman's struggle has always been a thriving reality. And this novel is brimming with such a struggle as Molly, being unwelcome in her mother's house, hitches a ride to New York, earns another scholarship, works part time to pay rest of the fee and enrolls in a film school- her evermore passion. Throughout the novel, the author uses humor as a method of inclusion and persuasion also, to cast a critical eye at how society mistreats women, gays, minorities, and the poor.

In the end, I would say that the novel, armed with some laughs, and the inevitable makings of a young lesbian life, does make for an unconventional read!

'Tales of the City' and 'More Tales of the City'

By Armistead Maupin

Kishore Kumar

I wandered out like a haggard ghost, and there she was, Frisco — long, bleak streets with trolley wires all shrouded in fog and whiteness.

~ Jack Kerouac

Tales of the City was originally published as a daily newspaper serial, much like Dickens' Oliver Twist. But Armistead Maupin, the author, has been compared to Dickens in other ways too. His realistic and captivating depiction of the seventies reminds one of the Victorian England of David Copperfield. Brilliant characterisation, a page-turner of a plot, and a keen eye for humanity make the books ready favourites.

A total of seven books have been published in the series, beginning with Tales of the City in 1978, followed by More Tales of the City in 1980, ending in the most recent seventh book, Michael Tolliver Lives, published in 2005.

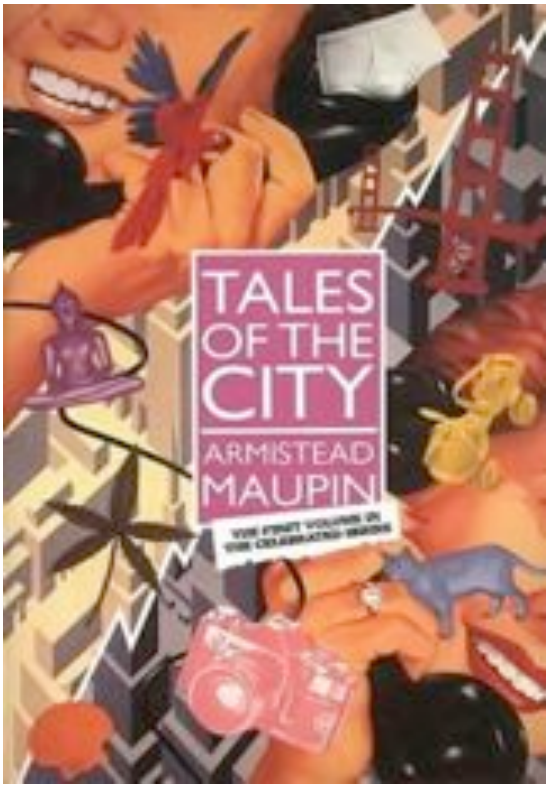
The 'City' is San Francisco. The time is the 1970's. And the plot is riveting.

An enigmatic landlady called Anna Madrigal who invites tenants into her territory with a neatly rolled joint pinned to their doors, has a hundred secrets up her sleeve. A rookie in the ways of Frisco, Mary Ann Singleton from Cleveland struggles through, and enjoys, the process of making the City her home which she will not be able to leave even for the love of her life. Michael Tolliver, 'a perfect Kinsey six', born to ultraconservative homophobic parents from the country, moves from one boyfriend to another until he finds love in a Jon Fielding of the unlikely profession of Gynaecology, loses it, and finds it again. Mona Ramsey, one of Mrs Madrigal's tenants, is treasured by the landlady very much like a daughter – perhaps too much so. Love comes knocking to the door of Brian Hawkins, the single boy next-door, though in a very, very weird way. And then there is Norman Neal Williams, the inscrutable occupant of the Penthouse who charms as he disgusts. And finally the Halcyons, a filthy rich business family whose lives get uncannily intertwined with those of Mrs Madrigal's little family.

This potpourri of characters living at 28, Barbary Lane, San Francisco, have their lives meet in a way guaranteed to captivate. And through their time together, they emerge a family as strong as any, joined in bonds stronger than blood. Straight, gay, lesbian and transgender – they're all there, living in perfect harmony and pride, evolving through their experiences. The characterisation by the author is immaculate and flawless. The characters are consistent and believable to begin with, and as you follow them, you will find yourself by turns rejoicing and weeping with them. And perhaps even find a little bit of yourself in their unlikely tale.

Which brings us to the plot, the final touch of perfection. In the first book, the group at 28, Barbary Lane takes its full shape as a family and embarks on adventures of self discovery, grand deceptions, illicit love affairs, spy-detectives, friendship and love found and lost, culminating in a couple of deaths, one after a beautiful love story, another in very mysterious circumstances. The second book begins with an innocent stranger's love, goes to someone's tracing of their roots to a desert whorehouse, rediscovery of a lost love in an old flame on a wet Mexican dance-floor, and ends in the revelation of a great secret no seasoned reader would ever have suspected. Moving from trailer parks to bathhouses, from bars to supermarkets, from fat-farms to high society parties of the A-Gays, we live their lives, always returning to 28, Barbary Lane as our base. Gay, lesbian, straight and transsexual come together in beautiful and even enviable ways in the 70's Frisco of Maupin's.

A television miniseries based on the first book was screened in 1993, followed by its sequel in 1998. Capturing a chunk of time along with the period's sights and sounds, flavours and idiosyncrasies requires a kind of genius Maupin is generously endowed with. Tales of the City did to the 70s' San Francisco what we very well know Friends did to the 90s' New York. Gloriously immortalised. That Frisco happens to be the gay capital of the world was no coincidence. Hats off, Armistead Maupin.



The grand old man of Indian gay writing

Udayan

Hoshang Dinshaw Merchant was born in 1947 to a Parsi business-family in Bombay. He was educated at Bombay, Los Angeles, Purdue and Jerusalem. Now a Professor of Poetry and Surrealism at the Hyderabad Central university, Merchant is widely known for his gay anthologyYaarana- Gay Writing from India. Being an openly gay academician hasn't been easy for Merchant- he had been beaten up by goons, and barred from entering the men's rooms. But the eccentric man's indomitable spirit has shown him through tough times, on more than one occasion. He lives in a Muslim housing complex in Hyderabad and talks freely about sex, politics and literature.

Oh, that's just a disguise! It's better to be made fun of because of your beard than to be made fun of because they think you're a hijra.

How's life as an openly gay professor at HCU?

My students and seniors are very supportive. My life there is pretty much protected, though I can't say the same for life outside campus.

How difficult was coming out?

Very. I waited for my father to die before I could publish my first book. The local Zoroastrians shunned me thinking I'll be a corrupting influence on the children, and when the goons beat me up, they really wanted to kill me. Here in this housing society people treat me with contempt. The mullahs are furious that I don a beard like them!

What are you working on right now?

My autobiography which should be out by year end, and the second edition of Yaarana, containing more stories from across South Asia- Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Kashmir.

In the introduction to Yaarana, you mention your reservations about the 'gay identity'…

I find the word 'gay' rather exclusive, 'queer' on the other hand is much more inclusive. You see, everyone is queer to some extent. My father used to be a very queer man!

And the dedication will remain the same? (Dedicated to my lovers- past, present and future..)

Yes… though I don't really see the possibility of any future lovers! (laughs)

How is the current state of gay literature in India?

Very disappointing indeed!

And you don't see an Indian Edmund White or Alan Hollinghurst in the foreseeable future?

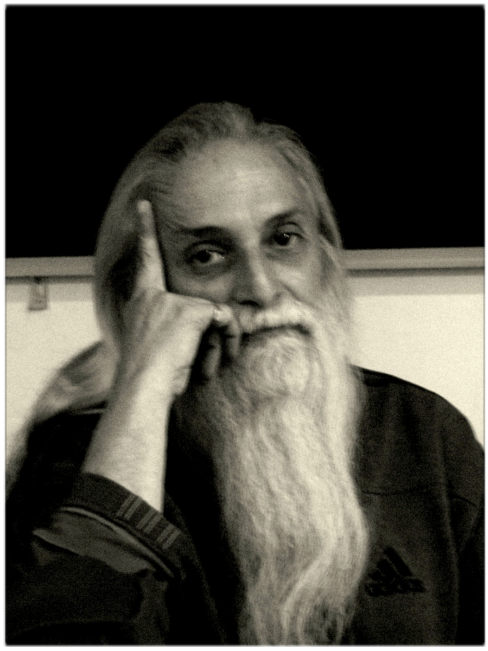
I can't say, but also let's not think of the two on the same plane. White wrote from the depths of his heart, while Hollinghurst writes for straight readers. I couldn't even complete 'The Swimming Pool Library'! though I must admit I haven't read 'The Line of Beauty' yet.

Where is the Indian gay movement heading to?

I think it's copying the west too much. We must maintain our distinct queer identity. It's happening because of the influence of globalization.

You seem to be suggesting that globalization is a negative influence…

Globalization is destroying cultures worldwide. Today's young gay Indians may think of globalization as an instant road to freedom, coming out may not be as difficult as it used to be, but let us be clear about the fact that there can never be success without decadence. History bears testimony to this fact.



Excerpts from the new introduction to Yaarana by Hoshang Merchant

"Recently the Delhi High Court read down article 377(b) of the Indian Penal Code which prohibits homosexual acts. The government has yet to plead its case before the Supreme Court simply because it is afraid of a public backlash. Meanwhile poor gays continue to be exploited by the police in Delhi as elsewhere and rich, closet homosexuals continue submitting to blackmail if not murder as at Vasant Vihar, Delhi and in other parts of India. On-line gay chat-groups claim that police exploitation has lessened in Delhi but I saw no statistics to back up their claims. I think it is just wishful thinking on the part of their spoilt young cocooned by their parents' wealth and social acceptance of the gay identities. No change in the law has taken place at the time of this book going to press though the media, as usual, has gone mad 24 x 7 with its gay hoopla.

Since I wrote Yaraana ten years ago, the new term 'queer' has come into vogue even in India. Judith Butler (among others) invented the term to mean that all men and women have a little bit of the gay in them. Modernism used the categories 'straight' or 'gay'. Post-modernism uses 'queer' which is more complicated, kinder, poetic. In India, however, this would implicate everybody and frighten everybody. This would further inhibit acceptance by India of its gays. Just as there is stupidity in the world there is also compassion. I suppose 'gay' will be current in India a little longer.

A whole new generation has grown up under globalization watching Hollywood and Bollywood movies and daily T.V. news-stories about gays. They are more at ease with their own sexualities and that of people around them but they are also under renewed pressure from their families, schools, churches. Saving souls is as big a business as the world-economy that gays continue to play into from the comfort of their double-income / single-sex 'families'! Dailt gays are thrown on the scrap-heap.

A word of caution on 'gay marriage' : This will only lead to the bourgeoisification of gays, not necessarily a good thing 'Married' gays with 'families' suit the world-economy better than less well-off, single gays. Marriage is a decaying institution in the West. India's gays should question the concept of marriage instead of swallowing a bait thrown them by the globalised economy. Also, gays should not blindly imitate straights."

.

Out of Quarantine: Rahul Mehta

***Vikram Tyagi** discusses 'Quarantine' a recently released collection of gay themed short stories with its Indian American writer Rahul Mehta. The stories and characters explore the lives of young Indian gay men in the United States- how their ethnicity and their sexuality interweave into riveting narratives*

When did you first think of writing a book on the lives of the Indian-American gay men in the US?

In terms of writing, work that tells more explicitly with gay characters developed slowly over time. Probably the first time I wrote a gay character, I felt this works a lot better for me in terms of quality. This is something I feel more passionately about. It was nothing planned. All the stories grew organically.

What inspired you to write such stories in particular?

I am very much a line by line writer. I never sat down to say that I'm going to write a story. For me, the story blooms out of this first line and after some time, I do start thinking about the plot. But, I hope, that the plot grows out of characters. I do draw a fair amount from personal experiences as well.

The themes of homosexuality and Indian values have been intricately weaved throughout. How autobiographical are these stories?

The work is definitely not autobiographical. I am very much resistant to the label 'autobiographical' because that gives people the impression that the stories are somehow true, but they are not. They are very much fiction. But, having said that, they are definitely shaped by personal experiences. It's very easy for readers to wrongly conflate the characters with me because we do share a lot of similarities on a superficial level.

Which is that one character among all stories that you relate yourself the most with?

May be the character in "The Cure". He is a little bit neurotic. What the character struggles with has to do with social justice, enormous disparity between the haves and the have-nots. What the character also struggles with is the guilt he feels in having a certain level of privilege. His way of dealing with it is almost anarchist sort of way. I hope he characterizes me or sets something which I feel.

Pick one story from your book which is also closest to your heart.

Actually, "The Cure" is also my favorite story. I like the plot but what I really like about it is the language, tight minimalist kind of words. What the story is trying to do is say a lot by saying little.

How difficult has it been for you to be a gay and an Indian-American living in the US? Is it a double whammy?

Yes! It was a double whammy. We grew up in West Virginia. In both senses, I felt like an outsider. When we first shifted to the town, there were only two South-Asian families living in a twenty mile radius. Largely, the population is white. Growing up brown skin in this place sort of put me on the outside. I didn't come out as a gay person till I left the town.

How far do your characters fit within the notion "American Dream"?

I am really interested in characters who are, first of all, on the outside. Characters who struggle, who are lost and don't really know their place in the world. These are the characters who make mistakes and don't always behave in the best way. My characters are very much on the outside of the "American Dream".

What was the reaction you received from your friends and family members on your debut book "Quarantine"?

I don't think most of them have read it. Partly because it's not out in the US yet. Most of my relatives in India now know about the book but I don't know if they are going to read it. Actually, it really doesn't matter.

What's your take on the state of gay literature in India?

I have to be honest, I don't know a lot about the state of gay writing in India. It's interesting for a lot of the period I was writing this book, I was trying really hard not to read things that I felt might influence me too much. I avoided a lot of things that I ordinarily be voracious about. I'm, of course, incredibly curious about gay Indian literature. Now that my book is done, I can spend a little more time reading.

Who is your favourite gay/lesbian author?

There is this writer called Scott Heim. He wrote a book several years ago called "Mysterious Skin", that was amazing. His third book which came out sometime back, "We Disappear", I think is phenomenal and thought it didn't get the amount of attention it deserved.

Despite the legalization of same-sex relationships in India by the Delhi High Court, a gay professor from Aligarh Muslim University committed suicide for he was publicly humiliated on the grounds of sexuality. Your comments.

It's deeply upsetting. It's particularly shocking to me that it could happen in the context of an academic institution. Academic Institutions are where ideas can be explored. Where the idea is very progressive or very conservative, they all should co-exist. There are Universities even in the US where things like these happen. It's not so long ago when 'Mathew Shepherd' was beaten within inches of his life and tied to a fence and left there to die for the next few days.

Cinema

The World Unseen

Ratnesh

The World Unseen takes us to apartheid-era South Africa, seen through the eyes of two women of Indian descent, Amina and Marium. The two are as different as they can be. Amina is rebellious and unconventional, and holds responsible to no-one. On the other hand, Marium is a dutiful mother and wife. Despite their differing personalities, they gradually develop a friendship that has unforeseen effects on the life of Marium, leading her to question the traditions and conventions she has been brought up with.

Marium is a mother of two, and for the kids she has reconciled to her husband's wanton disregard for her well being. Then she meets Amina by chance, and realizes that she may have another shot at happiness. But aren't the penalties for this too high? How will the others think? And besides, there are children to consider.

One day, sheer chance brings Amina and Marium into close proximity and they share a meaningful glance. The intensity of the gaze guarantees that they will eventually kiss. Guess their first act of romance? Exchanging volumes of Victorian literature.

The movie is so light and natural that the viewer will like it for its simplicity, if not excellent characterization. The big issues of communal acceptance, individual freedom and responsibility are brought in a decorous way. The tags Indian, Coloured, Lesbian, and Romance make it all the more desirable to watch.

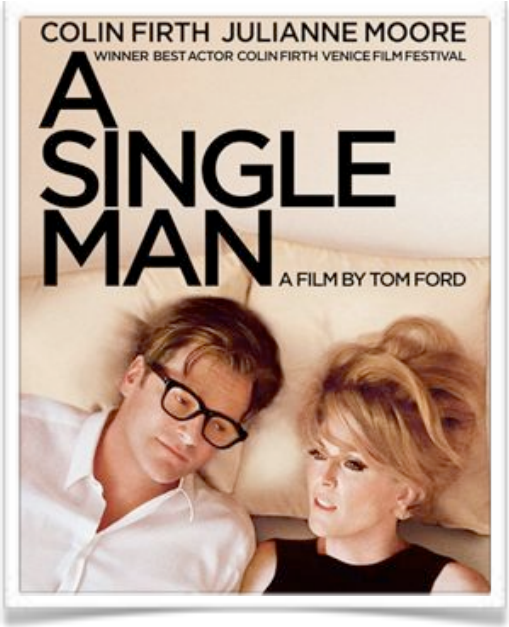
'The World Unseen' took my heart away. I am gay, and I avoid lesbian stuff, but I can't help but watch it over and over again! Hey guys, let's see a world unseen!

A Single Man

Kishore Kumar

Very often, we have at the centre of our lives a single point which gives us strength and purpose – a dream, an idea, a conviction, a vendetta, a love. This single point remains the pillar of support around which we weave our stories and plan our days. And then all of a sudden there comes a moment when the earth around us shakes, and this strong pillar falls down, gets uprooted – a betrayal, a loss, a death. The mansions we built around the pillar collapse, and we are left rummaging through the rubble looking for any remaining shreds of meaning. And we realize there is no meaning in it. Life around us moves on, but we don't move with it. After such an end, is planning your own death the logical thing to do? Or will something cross your path and give you some impossible hope?

A Single Man is one such story. And what a story it is! It's based on the novel of the same name by Christopher Isherwood, and is told with such elegance that it captures every emotion involved in such a loss. Dated November 1962, it is the story of one day in the life of an English Professor George at a California University after he lost his companion and partner for 16 years, Jim, to an accident in a snowstorm. The emptiness



in his life in the absence of Jim is palpable every moment as he plans his suicide and writes letters of adieu to his friends, including his maid. Through these movements, his life with Jim flashes in front of his eyes. Jim is played by Matthew Goode, and George himself is played by Colin Firth in what is definitely his most moving performance.

Through his day, he has dinner with his longtime female friend Charlotte, meets a stranger called Carlos, a boy from Madrid, and makes friends with one of his students, the handsome Kenny. What follows from the friendship is a lesson in hope. But what will happen after? The Lord works in mysterious ways, indeed. The direction of this movie is top class, with a lot of attention given to the accurate depiction of life in America of the sixties. The photography is very artistic. All these contributions have given this movie a great success. And of course, it is a must watch.

Show Me Love

Ananya Dhote

As you see this movie, you can almost feel a flower blooming inside of you. The bittersweet intricacies of love and attraction, the lonely feeling, little anxieties of youth, variability of people and situations, boredom, self-doubt, and bursts of transitory happiness, all of this curls up inside a bud that blooms into a beautiful flower by the end of the movie. And a pink one at that!

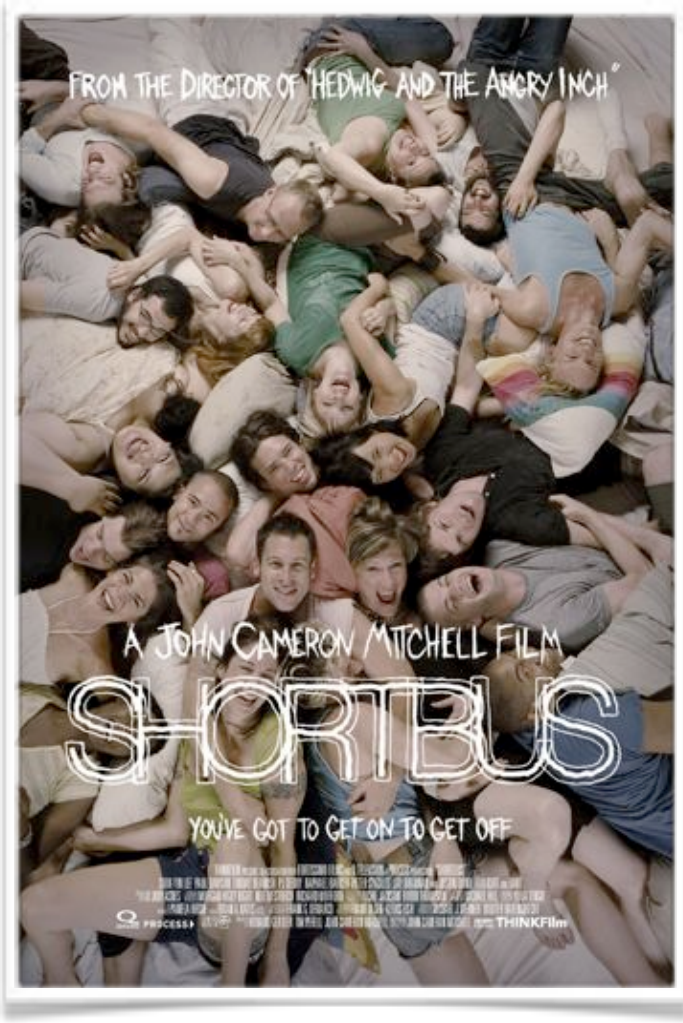
Two girls and Åmål, an isolated Swedish town that one could describe as "fucking" in a very teenage sort of way. Elin is beautiful, popular with guys, bored and hates life. Agnes is shy, has no friends at school and is secretly in love with Elin. Elin is ignorant of Agnes's existence until we find a situation where Elin's sister Jessica dares her to kiss Agnes. She does it, leaving behind a hurt Agnes and then, they both go to a party at some friend's place. While their friends along with Jessica, giggle and tease Agnes about being a lesbian, Elin feels bad and goes back to apologize. Thus begins their short unplanned date in which they have a real kiss, talk, open up and part with a promise to call each other the next day. However, we find that Elin, being unable to understand or talk to people about her feelings for Agnes, finds solace in jumping into a superficial and socially acceptable relationship with a high school lad, Johaan, who is desperately in love with her. Agnes is devastated. And thus gradually we see our protagonists ride over inevitable meanderings of youth and discover themselves and of course, love.

Agnes (Rebecca Liljeberg) and Elin (Alexandra Dahlström) give amazing performances. The movie models fiction in scenes and situations that come straight (or may I say gay!) off the shelf of life. It talks in varied undertones. It is of course, about two teenage girls (who are perhaps lesbian or bisexual) discovering their sexuality; though, there are also spurts of scenes and dialogues that address issues of coming out and the social reaction to it. Agnes's parents are sensitive and supporting; her mother has a balanced view on homosexuality until she gets a little anxious and upset upon discovering that the school gossip circles call her daughter a lesbian. Elin says that her worst nightmare is getting married, having loads of kids, a house, a car and being stuck in Åmål! She disapproves of her sister's boyfriend who thinks that girls don't understand technical gadgets or sports and are only tailor-made for applying make-up and looking good. Thus the movie is as much about independent women carving out their niche as it is about growing up and sexuality.

Fucking Åmål or Show Me Love (its English version) by Swedish director Lukas Moodysson was "out" in 1998, way before the current worldwide surge of LGBT activism and acceptance. Yet, no matter how progressive or liberal the scenario gets, this is a movie that will always appeal to one's senses because it essentially talks about love, self-discovery and human behavior in the environs of an unconventional setup such as gender identity and sexuality. And it will hold on your memory all the way long because there are no quantum leaps in growing up.

Shortbus

Arijeet Chandra



Shortbus is an American film written and directed by John C Mitchell.

The plot revolves around a weekly gathering of sexually driven people at a salon called Shortbus. Inspired by early 2000s NYC underground meetings, the Salon is not only a place for sexual orgy, but also is a club where different kinds of people get together and discuss music, art, politics etc. Shortbus has a variety of explicit scenes of sexuality and this had/has given it a tag of pornographic film, but according to writer-director Mitchell, the film attempts to "employ sex in new cinematic ways".

The plot has a mélange of characters and therefore portrays numerous kinds of emotional as well as sexual relationships. Sofia, a New York City based sex therapist cum couple counselor, comes across to James and Jamie, a gay couple who have been monogamous for five years. The persistent denial of sexual relationship from some time made both to seek consultation of Sofia. Sofia, herself dissatisfied sexually with her husband, reveals the facts of her marriage during the first session with James and Jamie. The couple suggests her to visit "Shortbus", a salon in Brooklyn. There, Sofia along with her husband Rob enter a world where she hopes to find her answers. The character of James is another pivotal role of movie. The film reels on revealing many observances about human sexual and emotional connections.

Watching Shortbus has been a unique experience. This brief movie of 101 minutes can boast of broadening one's view of sexual pleasure by providing numerous examples. It may not make an impression as commercial cinema does, however this experimental cinematic piece is not to be missed.

Bomgay

Karan Sood

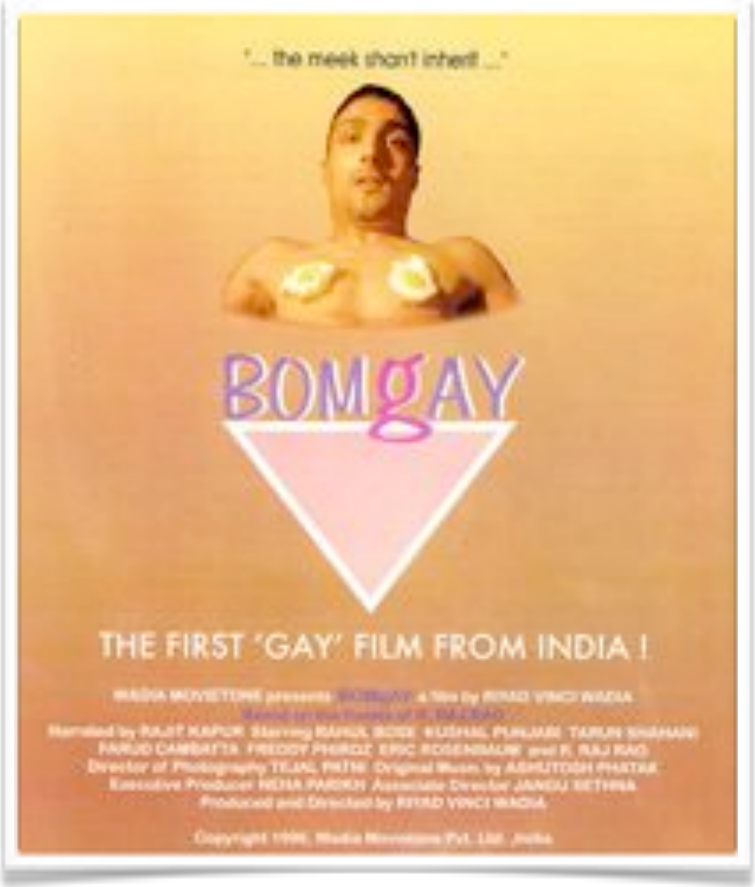
One afternoon, in 1996, R. Raj Rao called Riyad Vinci Wadia and asked if he could come around to show him some poems he had recently written. Raj had been invited to attend the writing program and workshop at Iowa State University and was keen that Riyad should film him with a video camera to have some visual material reading some of his poems. And this led to the making of the very first Indian Gay Film.

Approximately stretched for 12 minute of length, this short film depicts the underground and twisted nature of the gay identity in urban India. Scripting verses as the screenplay well establishes the depth of imagery to show the Indian gay life of the 1990's. Even though I found it difficult to comprehend the scenes at times; and since the movie has been banned in India, it was very difficult to get a good print of it.

The movie was made in a couple of days due to time limitations; whose effect is reflected in not-so-good cinematography and not-so-good direction. Considering the on-screen part, most of the cast had done a commendable work even though they occupy the screen just for few seconds or more. The most common faces recognized in Bomgay are Rahul Bose, Kushal Punjabi, Tarun Shahani, R Raj Rao and Farud Cambata.

After the release, for the next several months the film received reams of newsprint. It opened up an extensive discussion on homosexuality in India and it brought the "G" word into people's homes. In all the press that the film received there was not one reaction that was negative or derogatory.

Overall, you can manage to take out 12 minutes sometime; but only if you get its print. The movie is banned; but still spending sometime on Google can help you to get a copy of poetic classic film.



The Gay Genie

A gay man was walking along the beach at Fire Island when he stumbled upon a Genie's lamp. He picked it up and rubbed it, and lo-and-behold, out popped a gay genie.

The Genie said, "Hey Girl, wassup?"

The amazed man asked if he got three wishes.

"Nope, just one...due to inflation, constant downsizing, low wages, third-world countries, my new pumps pinching my big toes, and fierce global competition, I can only grant you one wish. So...what'll it be? The complete set of Tyson Cane videos? A copy of the Marilyn Monroe Happy Birthday Mr. President sequined dress in your size with matching shoes?"

The man shook his head 'no', and didn't hesitate. He said, "I want peace in the Middle East. See this map? I want these countries to stop fighting with each other."

The Genie looked at the map and shrieked, "Miss Thaaaaaang, I don't think so, not in this lifetime!! These countries have been at war for thousands of years. I'm good, but not THAT good! I don't think it can be done. Make another wish."

The man thought for a minute and said, "Well, I've never been able to find the right man, you know, one that's considerate and fun, warm and affectionate, gorgeous, is well endowed, only wants sex from me, doesn't do drugs or drink too much, has a great job with a good income, likes to cook and helps with the housecleaning, and gets along with my family, doesn't watch sports all the time, and tells me I always look fabulous, and is great in bed. That's what I wish for... the perfect guy to have as my lover."

The Genie let out a long sigh, clutched his hand to his heart and said, "Oh Miss Thang... let me see that map again."

PHOTOGRAPHY

Documenting Pride

CHARLES AND SARAH

Charles Meacham and Sarah Baxter have embarked upon an ambitious project at a time and age when much cynicism surrounds gay pride celebrations- both within gay and straight people. The project called "Word Wide Pride" captures in moments of photographic genius Pride parades across the world. As Charles and Sarah travel across the globe, Pink Pages talked to them about their venture

How did the WWP Project come about? What was the motivation and what did you hope to achieve through it?

The project was developed both from following the debates on gay right issues in the news, and experiencing the energy of the Taipei Pride March. Through images of pride we aspire to promote LGBT pride on an international scale, and to increase awareness by the heterosexual community regarding basic human right issues.

Gay rights, like all human rights, is a topic that we both sincerely and enthusiastically support. We really hope we can encourage other people to see it in this light, and that through this project we can help promote acceptance of equal human rights.

When did it start and how long will it be on?

The first pride march photographed was Taipei pride last October. The vibrancy of 25,000 people gathering in Taiwan to support LGBT rights led us to really start thinking about pride from a global perspective. It led us to question how pride parades are held in different countries around the world, those in Asia, Africa, North and South America, and Europe, those where homosexuality is more accepted, and those where it is not.

Of course, one of our most basic challenges is how to effectively cover a range of

Photographs : Previous page, Left, Top, Next page top :: Sydney Pride 2009

parades that not only are often held during the same month -- June, but are also usually on the same day, so as to commemorate the Stonewall Riots.

While our original plan was to complete the project within a year, we decided to extend the project to 14 months, so we would be able to cover additional pride parades. At the end, we are hoping to set up a gallery exhibit of the photos taken during this project, along with a multimedia display of the issues and stories behind the marches.

Which cities have you covered so far and which ones are on your radar? Any plans to visit India?

So far we have documented the Taipei, Manila, and Sydney marches. It's been a special experience as each has been very unique. As the level of societal acceptance, support, and legal equality for gay communities vary at each parade location around the world, it's interesting to be able to document the similarities and contrasts. Some of the key stops on our intended international journey will be the pride parades held in Minsk, Bucharest, Jerusalem, London, Warsaw, Amsterdam, Mumbai, Tokyo, New York City, and the largest pride parade in the world held in São Paulo.

From the very beginning, pride events in India were high on our list of places we hoped to visit. Both Charles and I are extremely fond of India, especially as Amritsar in Punjab is the place where we first met.

We are very impressed by how many pride marches have been organized in India, and the passion of the marchers. We are truly delighted to attend this year's Queer Azaadi march in Mumbai.

How have you found the experience so far? Any special moments?

Being able to participate in the marches is an incredible life experience. I think anyone who has been a part of just one of these events can tell you about this feeling of positive energy and good will that is created. In each of the three parades I've photographed, there has been a moment where I've just stepped back and thought, "Wow, this is really happening." Then just for a minute or two, I put my cameras

down and really just try to absorb everything that is going on around me. It gets pretty emotional. I just feel so positive at that moment, that with all of this energy, things are going to change. They have to change.

You have been making extensive use of the internet to showcase your work till now…

One of the goals of this project is to make it easily accessible. That's why we are using a digital platform to promote and showcase the images collected during this project. We'd also like to encourage the networking of those who feel passionate about these issues via social media technologies, and would like to personally invite supports to connect with the project on Facebook, Flickr, and even Youtube.

Photographs : Below left, Center :: Philippines Pride 2009 , Right :: Taipei pride 2009

All links are available from the project's Pride Blog: http://wwpproject.wordpress.com
To further support the project and the theme of global pride, a 2010 calendar listing pride parades around the world was created. It contains embedded YouTube videos of the marches, and links to the WWP's photography: http://www.bestprideparades.com.
For those interested in following the WWP's progress as we travel to pride festivals around the globe, you can visit our main website at: http://www.walkwithpridenow.com

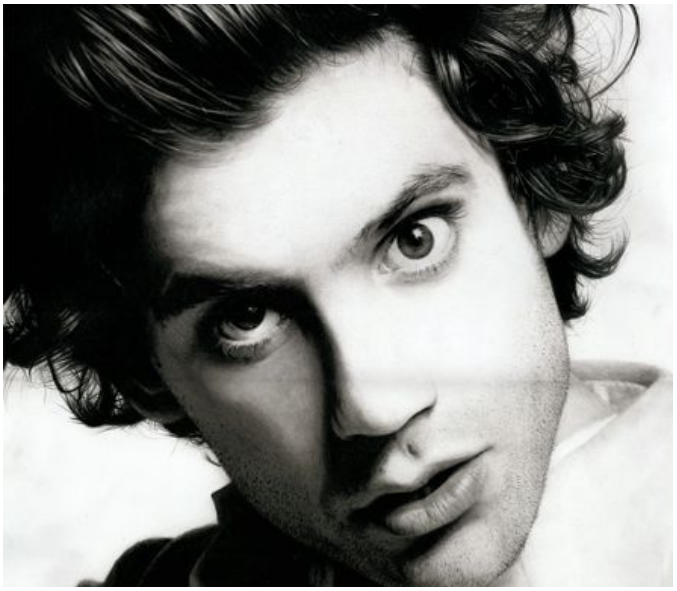
Like never before, our celebrities are not only proud of their bisexuality, they dare to intimate with great élan. We bring to you the seven most hot and desired bisexual celebs from around the world.

Bi the way, I'm a Celebrity!

7 HOTTEST BISEXUAL CELEBRITIES

Angelina Jolie: The lady who not only enjoys her stature under the brand name 'Brangelina'. This Greek Goddess has equally been in the news for her lustful lesions with women. She has played a few lesbian roles on screen, such as, in the movie Gia in 1998 and a few outside in her real life. She openly talks about her relationship with Jenny Shimizu, her co-star in Foxfire in 1996. Angelina Jolie was welcomed with open arms by the LGBT community for her honest revelation and soon became an idol for every bisexual woman. Janet Jackson once remarked Angelina Jolie as the sexiest woman alive and said, "I don't know if it's her attitude or her ass, but for me that's the most beautiful part of the body."

Mika: Although, this British singer-songwriter is a newbie in the business, with his very first full-length studio album, Life in a Cartoon Motion, he not only managed to win a BRIT Award but also received a Grammy Award nomination for it. Mika doesn't talk straight about his sexuality and hates to label himself in anyway. In a September 2009 interview with a Dutch magazine, Gay & Night, Mika commented on his sexuality: "I've never ever labeled myself. But having said that; I've never limited my life, I've never limited who I sleep with. So, I don't know. Call me whatever you want. Call me bisexual, if you need a term for me." Mika hinted about his love for men in his song, Billy Brown, which is about a married man who has an affair with another man.



Drew Barrymore: She is fun, bubbly and enigmatic. Drew Barrymore is one of the most prominent faces of Hollywood, who is quite known for her erroneous and troubled childhood. She was always vocal about her relationships with men, but her bisexuality was kept hidden for some time. Finally, in 2003 Barrymore admitted that she is bisexual. Drew says, "I think a woman and a woman together are beautiful, just as a man and a woman together are beautiful." In March 2007, Jane Pratt, former editor of a US magazine Jane claimed on her Sirius Satellite Radio show that she has romanced with the actress in mid 1990s. Drew Barrymore has also appeared on the cover of Jane in 1997.

Duncan James

Duncan is a member of the popular UK boy band Blue. He has proved his mettle as an actor and a television presenter as well. He's one of the few male celebrities to come out as bisexual and told it to the entire World in an interview with a tabloid, News of the World, on July 12, 2009. Duncan had his first relationship with a man in 2001. He commented, "I'd never had those feelings towards a guy before. But this person came into my life and put a spanner in the works". The singer mustered the courage to first come out to his mom over a vacation in Los Angeles. This multitasker is at much ease with himself now and takes great pride in his identity.

Lady Gaga: Popularly known as the Madonna of today's time, she knows what it takes to be a real pop star. Lady Gaga believes in doing things and does it in the most outrageous fashion. Her infamous song, Poker face, had hit the charts in 2008 with a theme of bisexuality deeply imbibed in it. In the video, she dances seductively with both men and women. She says, "There's something quite interesting about the song. If you listen to the lyrics in the chorus, I say, 'He's got me like nobody,' and then I say, 'She's got me like nobody.'" The diva has also posed nude for the Out magazine in September 2009. At the drop of a hat, she makes statements and with time, this lady has definitely proved that she is all gaga about gays.

Fergie: This Black Eyed Peas singer has been open and honest about her sexuality from the very beginning. She was angry and denied when everyone called it a new fad. The "London Bridge" star admits that she has had relationships with women before marrying the actor Josh Duhamel. Fergie strongly supports the issue of gay marriage and equal rights. She finds it unfair and ridiculous and says that it's crazy when, unlike others, few people are discouraged from a holy communion such as marriage.

Lindsay Lohan: She is perpetually in the limelight either for her visits to Drug Rehabilitation Centers or her over-hyped sexuality. The actress was initially surprised to discover her love for women but later admitting it, went on to say, "I appreciate people and it doesn't matter who they are, and I feel blessed to be able to feel comfortable enough with myself that I can say that'. In past, Lilo has revealed about her affair with a lesbian, DJ Samantha Ronson (Sam), but maintains the fact that she is a bisexual. In one of her interviews, she mentions how Sam has helped to keep her grounded and out of the party-hard lifestyle

National News

Prof. Siras found dead

Arrests made

AMU- tainted forever with homophobia

Less than two months after he was suspended and hounded out of his campus home on charges of having consensual homosexual act with a rickshaw-puller, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) teacher Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras was found dead in mysterious circumstances at his rented single-room accommodation in Quarti police circle of Aligarh on 8th April.

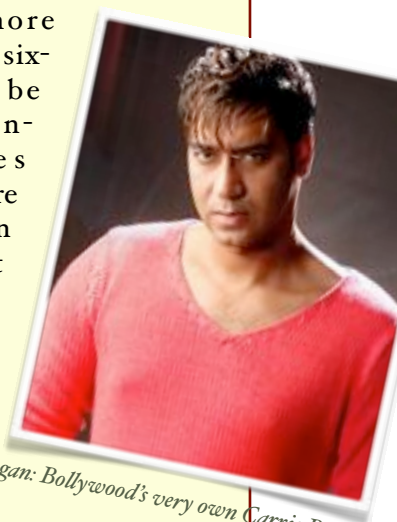
The death came to light after neighbours found foul smell coming from his room and informed the police. Police broke into the room to find Siras's decomposed body lying on the bed. It had traces of blood that had oozed out of his mouth.

The 60-plus Siras had shifted to the house in Durga Wardi area on February 27 after he was ordered to vacate his campus accommodation following his suspension. Neighbours said that he was last seen on previous Monday evening.

Days later, the police registered an FIR — on the direction of a court that had acted on the professor's complaint on April 5 against some persons for harassment. "Four AMU officials — Zubair Khan (proctor), Farheed Ahmad Khan (deputy proctor), Rahat Abrar (PRO), N A K Durrani (media adviser) — and three local journalists have been booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code," police inspector Ghanshyam Singh told reporters in Lucknow. The IPC sections include Sections 347 (wrongful confinement), 355 (assault with intent to dishonour person), 452 (house trespass), 506 (criminal intimidation), 120 B (criminal conspiracy)" a senior police officer told the media.

Ajay Devgan doesn't want to be a 'gay icon'

Guess who doesn't want to be a "gay icon"? Ajay Devgan, when asked recently why he's not building six-packs for his shirtless scene in an upcoming movie promptly replied that anyone who gets six packs now-a-days "gets transformed into a gay icon" and he doesn't want to be one. When asked to comment on this statement of his, John Abraham who's won over a considerable gay following given his famous bare-all in Dostana and public statements supporting the civil rights of LGBT Indians, was visibly surprised. "I've never resented being a gay icon, and I've always enjoyed the adoration of my gay fans" he told reporters. We hope now Ajay realizes it takes more than just six-packs to be gay icon- qualities that require more than just workouts to cultivate!



Ajay Devgan: Bollywood's very own Carrie Prejean?

International News

MALAWI GAY COUPLE GET MAXIMUM SENTENCE OF 14 YEARS

A judge in Malawi, on 20th May imposed a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison with hard labor on a gay couple convicted of gross indecency and unnatural acts. The judge said he wanted to protect the public from "people like you". Steven Monjeza, 26, and Tiwonge Chimbalanga, 20, have been in jail since they were arrested in December after holding an engagement ceremony.

The case has sparked international condemnation and a debate about homosexuality in the country. The British government, Malawi's largest donor, expressed its "dismay" at the sentences, but has not withdrawn aid. The US state department, meanwhile, said the case was "a step backwards in the protection of human rights in Malawi". Celebrities like Madonna have also given public statements expressing distress at the homophobic ruling.

FIRST DADT VICTORY; BUT GAY BAN BATTLE ISN'T OVER YET

The U.S. House voted 234 to 194 on the night of 27/5/10 to approve a compromise amendment that many believe will –with some conditions— eventually lead to the end of the military's policy of discharging gay service-members.

The vote was the second major victory of the day for proponents of repeal. The Senate Armed Services Committee approved a similar amendment just hours earlier by a vote of 16 to 12.

The fight is hardly over – at least two Republican senators have said they would support a filibuster over the underlying defense authorization bill in order to stop repeal of the 17-year-old Don't Ask, Don't Tell law. And, both chambers will have to vote again after a conference committee works out the differences between the two versions of the defense funding bill.

But for now, LGBT activists are celebrating a pair of dramatic and hard won victories against a policy which has led to the discharge of more than 13,000 service-members so far.

"The votes in the Senate Committee and on the House floor to repeal 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' constitute one of the most important advances in our fight against prejudice based on sexual orientation," said Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.), a key Democratic leader involved in that fight. "A very few years from now, it will be clear that the fears expressed by our opponents' arguments were totally without foundation. I particularly want to express my admiration and great appreciation to Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin, and Representative Patrick Murphy, for their extraordinary leadership in bringing this about."

OBAMA ORDERS HOSPITAL VISITATION RIGHTS

On 16th April, President Obama asked the Department of Health and Human Services to establish a rule that would prevent hospitals from denying visitation privileges to gay and lesbian partners.

The president's memo said, "There are few moments in our lives that call for greater compassion and companionship than when a loved one is admitted to the hospital. ... Yet every day, all across America, patients are denied the kindnesses and caring of a loved one at their sides."

PORTUGAL JOINS IN THE MARCH OF MARRIAGE

The president of Portugal announced on 20th May his decision to ratify a law allowing gay marriage in the small European country. The same-sex marriage bill first passed in the Portuguese parliament in January, but was subject to a presidential veto. The president's decision to sign the bill into law makes Portugal the sixth European country allowing same-sex couples to wed.

The ratification by President Anibal Cavaco Silva, described as a practicing Catholic, comes just days after a papal visit to the predominantly Catholic country where Pope Benedict spoke out against the legislation. When the Portuguese parliament first passed the same-sex marriage legislation, the Pope called it an "attack" on the "natural differences between men and women."

MOSCOW MAYOR BANS PRIDE MARCH ONCE AGAIN

Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov banned the Moscow Pride march for the fifth year in a row, UK Gay News reported.

Organizers submitted a parade request to the mayor's office last week, outlining a proposed route through the Russian capital. The openly homophobic mayor, who previously described gay Pride parades as "satanic happenings," has ruled out this year's march, set to take place May 29.

Previous pride parades in Moscow have faced wanton homophobic vandalism.

Ask Peer Queer

I'm a 30 year old working professional, I'm gay and got married 5 years back. Also, I have a daughter who is 3 and a half years old. Actually I took a long time to accept my sexuality, I can't explain the reasons but yeah, I've accepted my it now. All this was mainly because I grew up in a small town.

I told my wife 6 months back about me ,she was shattered to start with but she is now cool. We share a very good bond ,like good friends, but this thing always keeps coming between us. I don't have an answer to this issue now, I'm not feeling happy ,infact I'm rather depressed and it's affecting my life badly. It's very difficult to spend life like this, and I won't be able to do justice to her,and can't be happy myself .

I'm not bothered at all about soceity or my parents,I just think about my wife. We decided to let things go like that,but it's not working out. I can avoid sex ,it is difficult for me but I'm trying ,but it's not just about sex, it's about how I feel ,I need intimacy,like I need to hold someone's hand… I need a guy , I can't be intimate with a woman anymore. I can't go with xyz and sleep,it hurts me ,but i don't know what should I do. The options are clear infront of me ,but both are very difficult to

Dear Queer Married Small-town Dad,

You say that you are unhappy and sexually unfulfilled in your marriage, despite having come out your wife. You should also accept that your wife is likely to feel exactly the same way. It seems that your wife will prove to be your greatest ally in shifting towards happiness in both your lives. First, accept that there is no one key solution to instantly transform your situation on the outside. On the inside, however, you can decide to be happy right now, by being honest with yourself. Accept your weakness: It is ultimately you who agreed to wed this woman. Accept your strength: It is you decided to respect your wife enough to tell her the truth. Now that you share parenthood together, it also seems that your wife is willing to maintain a strong bond of friendship. Be as honest with her as you can, and you might be surprised at her resilience and acceptance, given that she has agreed to stand with you thus far. Both of you will have to accept that your marriage cannot mimic that of your parents. By building on your honesty and trust, you can transform your relationship into one that provides a happy and caring environment for all your family. Moreover, both you and your wife deserve to have sexually fulfilling lives. Hence, you have to be open to re-negotiating the terms of your marriage. You must both appreciate that you are not destined for a traditional marriage.

Next, be honest with your daughter. Children are extremely malleable and forgiving. Learning about the various ways that her father expresses love would not disappoint your daughter. Teach your child that each and every human is different and perfect. Certainly there are Internet resources to assist you in age-appropriate means to speak to children about sexuality in general so that youth never learn to be ashamed of their own bodies, let alone our many differences in race, caste, gender, class and sexualities. Specific to your circumstances, Ramon Johnson has a great article on About.com called 'Coming out to kids'. Johnson's article reminded me of how coming out to my own nieces and nephews put my whole family at ease. Moreover, it would be harder to unlearn shame, than just teaching your daughter to be proud, tolerant and respectful of all human beings. It will be like coming out all over again, but this time trust yourself enough that you will teach your daughter to have the sort of courage you lacked which landed you in a marriage on false terms.

Lastly, please vigilantly practice safer sex with all your partners, including your wife. Given the emotional trauma of coming out to your self and those near you, the last thing you need is the additional trauma of compromised physical health. Certainly, the awkwardness you may feel in establishing, for example, a condom only policy, is well worth protecting the health and welfare of yourself, and your child's mother. Your family should not bear the brunt of your misjudgments. Yet, as my mother always says: 'No man is an island'. This means that you must bring folks near upon whom you can rely as you go about your journey of self-recovery. Find a space of fellowship where you can experience spiritual acceptance. Just remember, you deserve to be happy.

In Solidarity and love,
Lavender Bodhisattva

(Send in your questions to Lavendar Bodhisattva at askpeerqueer@pink-pages.co.in)

Queer 'n Funny!

The Top 13 Reasons Jerry Falwell Thinks Your Favorite TV Character is Gay

13.*Fonzie*: has an "office" in the men's room and always tells guys to "sit on it."

12.If you're drunk enough, "Homer Simpson" sounds kinda like "homosexual."

11.*Popeye*: Vegetarian. Bodybuilder. Dresses like one of the Village People. "Girlfriend" has no visible breasts. You connect the dots, Chester.

10.*Batman & Robin*: They caress a bust, which reveals a pole that they wrap themselves around and slide down which strips them of their clothes and puts them in rubber suits and... Okay, maybe Falwell's got something here.

9.*Alex Trebek:* Lives with his mom and knows *way* too much about Broadway Musicals and potpourri.

8. "Shhhh, be vewy vewy wightous! I'm hunting a naked opewa-wuving wabbit!"

7. *Will from "Will & Grace"*: Not because the character is openly gay, but because if he were straight, he'd go by "Bill" and smoke cigars.

6. *That Peter Jennings* character on "ABC World News Tonight" is thin, neat and obsessed with the sex life of a guy named Bill.

5. *Fred Flintstone & Barney Rubble:* Fur house dresses? C'mon!

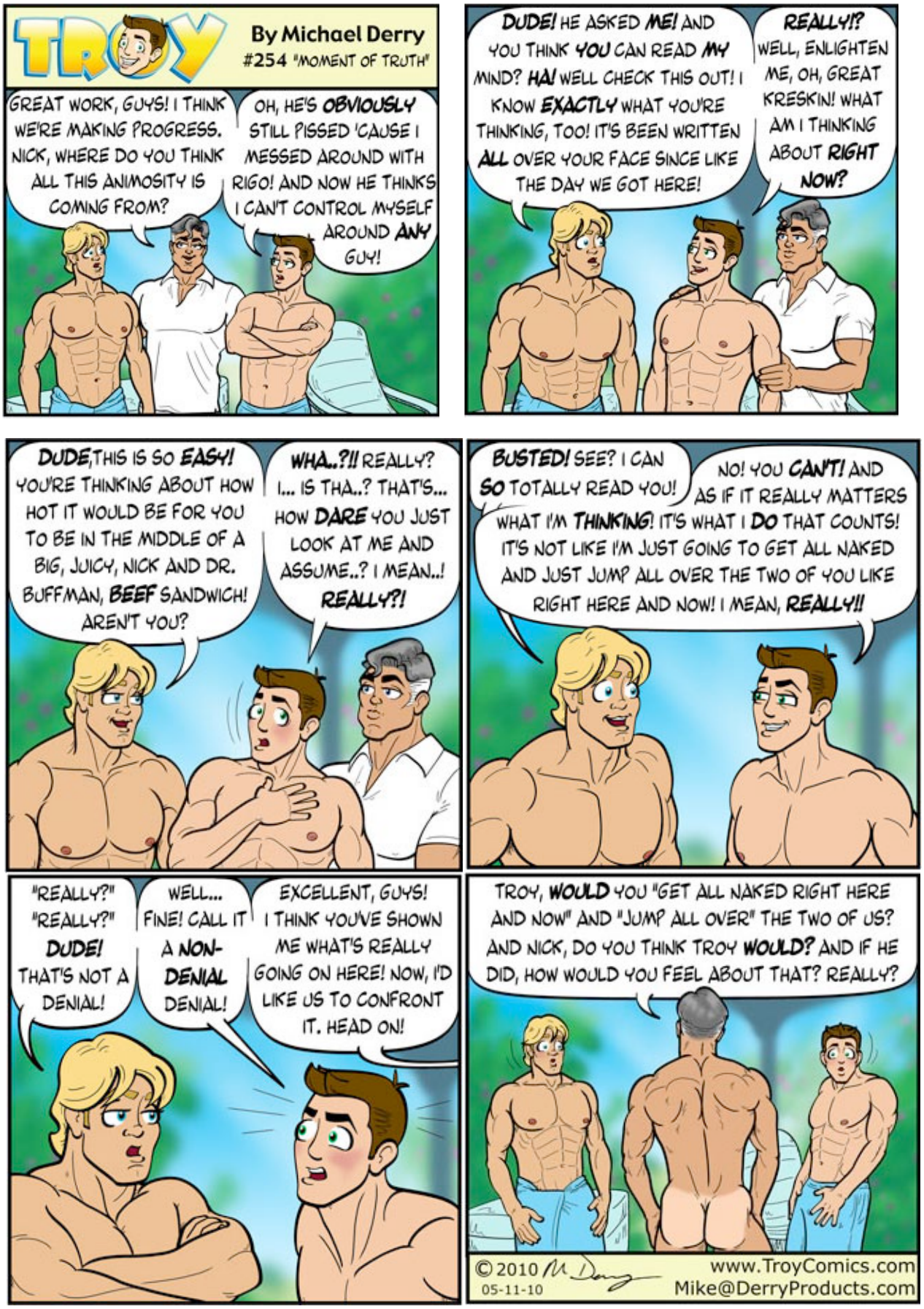
4. *Check the reruns closely:* Woody lives up to his name whenever Norm walks into the bar.

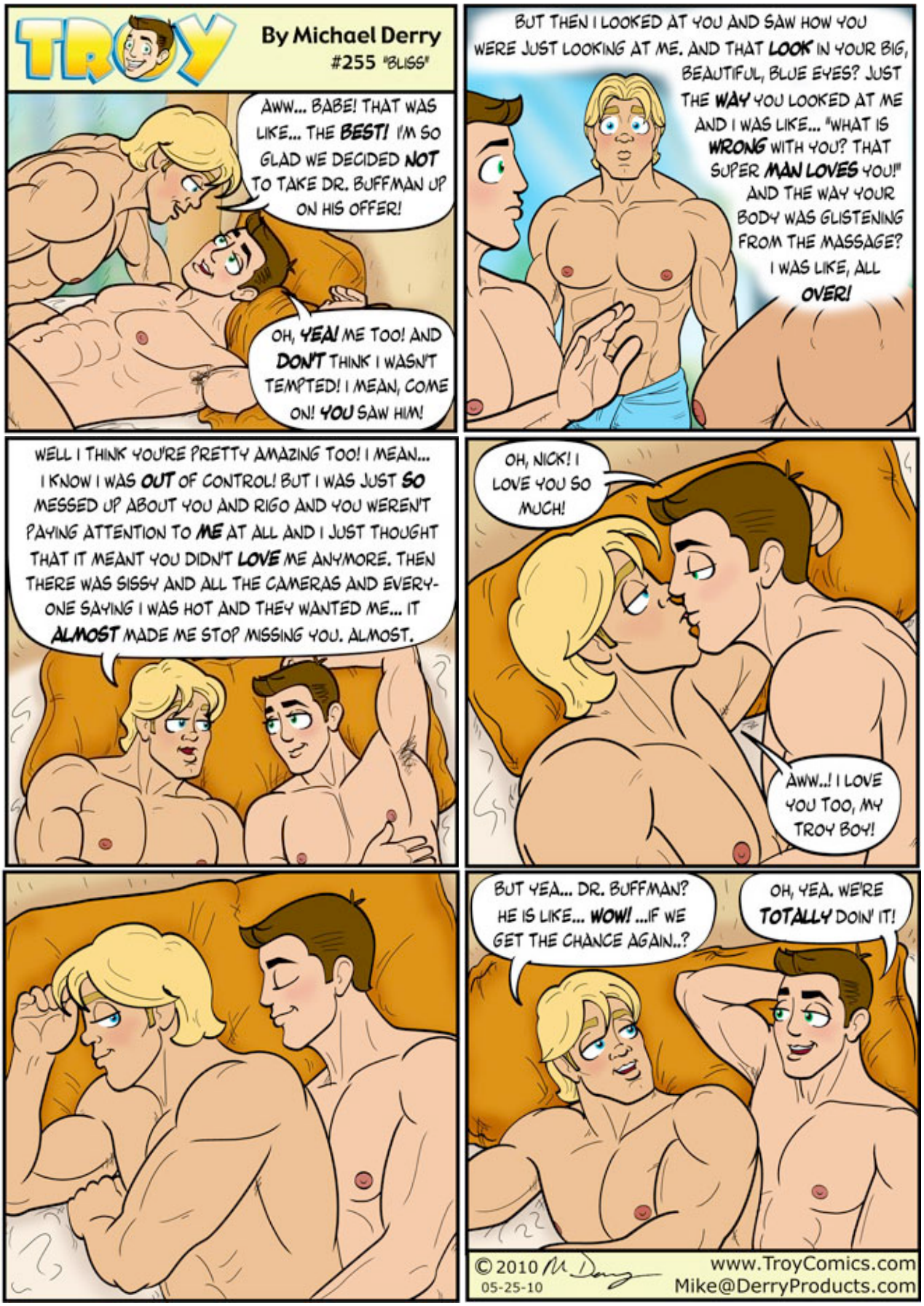
3. *The letters in "The Teletubbies"* can be rearranged to read, "He bites eel butt."

2. *"Dr. Quinn, Lesbian Woman"* and No. 1 Reason Jerry Falwell Thinks Your Favorite TV Character is Gay..

1. *David Hasselhoff:* 147 episodes of "Baywatch" with nary an erection.

Troy


TROY
By Michael Derry
#254 "MOMENT OF TRUTH"
GREAT WORK, GUYS! I THINK WE'RE MAKING PROGRESS. NICK, WHERE DO YOU THINK ALL THIS ANIMOSITY IS COMING FROM?
OH, HE'S OBVIOUSLY STILL PISSED 'CAUSE I MESSED AROUND WITH RIGO! AND NOW HE THINKS I CAN'T CONTROL MYSELF AROUND ANY GUY!
DUDE! HE ASKED ME! AND YOU THINK YOU CAN READ MY MIND? HA! WELL CHECK THIS OUT! I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE THINKING, TOO! IT'S BEEN WRITTEN ALL OVER YOUR FACE SINCE LIKE THE DAY WE GOT HERE!
REALLY!? WELL, ENLIGHTEN ME, OH, GREAT KRESKIN! WHAT AM I THINKING ABOUT RIGHT NOW?
DUDE, THIS IS SO EASY! YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT HOW HOT IT WOULD BE FOR YOU TO BE IN THE MIDDLE OF A BIG, JUICY, NICK AND DR. BUFFMAN, BEEF SANDWICH! AREN'T YOU?
WHA..?!! REALLY? I... IS THA..? THAT'S... HOW DARE YOU JUST LOOK AT ME AND ASSUME..? I MEAN..! REALLY?!
BUSTED! SEE? I CAN SO TOTALLY READ YOU!
NO! YOU CAN'T! AND AS IF IT REALLY MATTERS WHAT I'M THINKING! IT'S WHAT I DO THAT COUNTS! IT'S NOT LIKE I'M JUST GOING TO GET ALL NAKED AND JUST JUMP ALL OVER THE TWO OF YOU LIKE RIGHT HERE AND NOW! I MEAN, REALLY!!
"REALLY?" "REALLY?" DUDE! THAT'S NOT A DENIAL!
WELL... FINE! CALL IT A NON-DENIAL DENIAL!
EXCELLENT, GUYS! I THINK YOU'VE SHOWN ME WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON HERE! NOW, I'D LIKE US TO CONFRONT IT. HEAD ON!
TROY, WOULD YOU "GET ALL NAKED RIGHT HERE AND NOW" AND "JUMP ALL OVER" THE TWO OF US? AND NICK, DO YOU THINK TROY WOULD? AND IF HE DID, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT? REALLY?
© 2010 M Derry
05-11-10
www.TroyComics.com
Mike@DerryProducts.com


TROY
By Michael Derry
#255 "BLISS"
AWW... BABE! THAT WAS LIKE... THE BEST! I'M SO GLAD WE DECIDED NOT TO TAKE DR. BUFFMAN UP ON HIS OFFER!
OH, YEA! ME TOO! AND DON'T THINK I WASN'T TEMPTED! I MEAN, COME ON! YOU SAW HIM!
BUT THEN I LOOKED AT YOU AND SAW HOW YOU WERE JUST LOOKING AT ME. AND THAT LOOK IN YOUR BIG, BEAUTIFUL, BLUE EYES? JUST THE WAY YOU LOOKED AT ME AND I WAS LIKE... "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU? THAT SUPER MAN LOVES YOU!" AND THE WAY YOUR BODY WAS GLISTENING FROM THE MASSAGE? I WAS LIKE, ALL OVER!
WELL I THINK YOU'RE PRETTY AMAZING TOO! I MEAN... I KNOW I WAS OUT OF CONTROL! BUT I WAS JUST SO MESSED UP ABOUT YOU AND RIGO AND YOU WEREN'T PAYING ATTENTION TO ME AT ALL AND I JUST THOUGHT THAT IT MEANT YOU DIDN'T LOVE ME ANYMORE. THEN THERE WAS SISSY AND ALL THE CAMERAS AND EVERYONE SAYING I WAS HOT AND THEY WANTED ME... IT ALMOST MADE ME STOP MISSING YOU. ALMOST.
OH, NICK! I LOVE YOU SO MUCH!
AWW..! I LOVE YOU TOO, MY TROY BOY!
BUT YEA... DR. BUFFMAN? HE IS LIKE... WOW! ...IF WE GET THE CHANCE AGAIN..?
OH, YEA. WE'RE TOTALLY DOIN' IT!
© 2010
05-25-10
www.TroyComics.com
Mike@DerryProducts.com

Talk the Talk

So, the other day, I met up with a gay friend of mine. Two young gay guys, both single and looking, in the same car. The discussion on homosexuality was inevitable. We discussed all the different sorts of guys one meets. How society has shaped them. And how they behave.

There is the i-am-pure-top guy who is an absolute dick, extremely desirable, but completely deflated after an initial burst of producing interest in oneself. And yes, if you are not going to give a blow job, and touching cum is disgusting to you, dude, you are straight, so stop fucking guys simply because you could not get a girl (this is not meant to offend guys who are actually gay and have feelings similar to what I have written above). You can blow me or get the fuck out of my bed.

There is the i-am-oh-so-effeminate guy who is an absolute woman, says he is masculine, then plays with his extremely well maintained eye brows and bats his eye lashes at thewaiter shamelessly. Ok, so when we were talking on the phone, why the fuck did you have a fake voice? And why the hell did you tell me that everyone tells you that you are so straight acting. Don't you think I will see through the ten pounds of hair product, obscenely manicured eye brows, incredibly slated gait and demeanor, and the eye lash batting? Oh please! Don't lie to me, and if you did, you had better sleep with the waiter.

There is the i-am-so-fashionably-cool guy who is in showbiz, says he cares about people and is down to earth, but he has the ego the size of my dick when it is erect (read huge) and the huge flowers on his shirts make him look incredibly gay, and yes, everyone knows that you are gay because your clothes scream it out, and to top it off, if you make fun of my French Pronunciations, you are an elitist dick, even when you are mispronouncing every Urdu word by default because you want to make sure that you don't seem like you know the language spoken in your city by 99.5% of the people.

There is the i-am-so-emotionally-needy guy who would want to talk on the phone all the time and thinks it is romantic and not creepy, but he doesn't realize that there are people who have jobs and lives and will greet you at 7 pm by "did you remember me now after the whole day?". My reply until now was, I am so sorry, I thought that since we talked on the phone for two hours last night, one hour of which I was begging you to let me go, I could not call you by seven today. My reply, from now onwards is going to be, shut the fuck up and suck my sugar frosted dick, biyatch. Oh and sorry, but the quality of your skin is not the only good thing about you. Brainless idiot.

We also decided that in spite of these, and oh so many other negative stereotypes there are many good guys out there, we have both been with some.

And then we started discussing which hotel in Karachi is the best. Of course for having sexual trysts in. We did not reach an agreement. I liked Beach Luxury and he liked Hotel Mehran. Oh well! Maybe I'll try it next time.

(From the blog Tuzk e Jalali by Jalaluddin from Karachi, Pakistan)

Happenings

DELHI

GAY DELHI SUNDAY SOCIALS

Sunday

A weekly social gathering for gay and bisexual men. For more information on venues and timings and to know about other gay events in Delhi, join the GayDelhi email list by sending a blank email to gaydelhi-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

THE DELHI FRONTRUNNERS AND WALKERS

Sunday

A weekly running/walking club for Delhi's LGBTI people. For more details email frontdel@gmail.com

MUMBAI

GAY BOMBAY SUNDAY MEET

Sun, 6:00 pm

JATC (Just Around the Corner) Bandra West. Entry free. For more details, visit the GayBombay website.

BENGALUROO

GAY RUNNERS AND BREAKFAST

Sun, 8:30 am to noon

Gay runners meet at Cubbon Park and Airlines Hotel Contact: 98450-01168

SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

Thur, 7-9pm

Good As You is a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender support group.

Mail goodasyoublr@googlemail.com

CHENNAI

GAY PRIDE MARCH

June 27th, 2010 at the Marina beach. This marks the culmination of the month long pride celebrations.

Helplines

NAZ DOST HELPLINE FOR GAY MEN.

Monday to Saturday 1-7 pm

The Naz Foundation also hosts weekly meetings and support groups for men.

Call for details (011-2981-2287)

SANGINI HELPLINE

Tuesday noon 3 pm, Friday 6-8 pm

Sangini provides confidential advice for women who are attracted to women.

Call for details (011-6567-6450)

ICWO LESBIAN HELPLINE (CHENNAI)

Monday – Friday 9.00 AM to 6.00 PM

A dedicated helpline for Lesbians by the ICWO (Indian community welfare organization) in association with Action Aid

Call for details(044-6551-5742)

TARSHI HELPLINE

Monday-Wednesday 10 am-4 pm

Confidential and anonymous counseling and referrals on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

Call for details (011-2437-2229)

ALTERNATIVE LAW FORUM.

Mon- Fri, 9:30 am- 6:30 pm

The forum provides legal services related to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender rights.

122/4, Infantry Road, Bengaluru

(2286-8757)

LAWYERS' COLLECTIVE

Mon-Fri, 9am – 6pm

This collective works on issues related to discrimination on grounds of HIV and AIDS

First floor, 4A- MAH Road, Tasker Town, Shivajinagar, Bengaluru

(4123-4130)

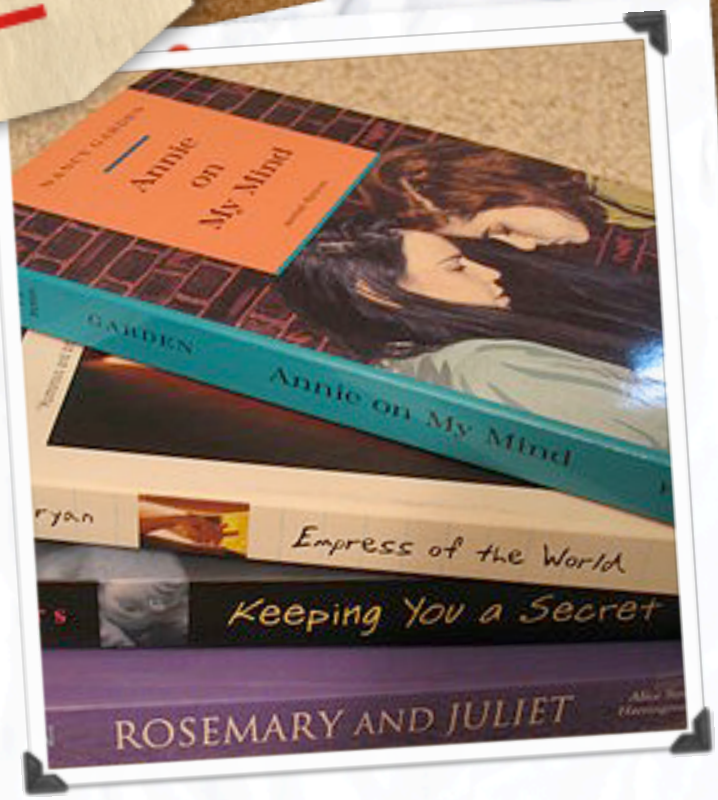
LESBIT

Sat 3:30- 6:30 pm, Sun 11:30 am – 6:30 pm

LESBIT is an organization that offers counseling for lesbians and the transgender community

Call for details (99452-31493)

PINK PAGES



So you think you're the next Edmund White?

Does your pen have that gay abandon? Do your words splash the world in the seven colors of the rainbow?

Then this one's for you!

INDIA'S NATIONAL LESBIAN AND GAY MAGAZINE INVITES BUDDING LGBT WRITERS TO CONTRIBUTE FOR

The Literature Special Issue

Send in your short stories and poems to editor@pink-pages.co.in

Get published, get noticed!

ADVERTISEMENTS
Promote your LGBT-friendly business with India's National Lesbian & Gay publication.
Contact: **advertisement@pink-pages.co.in**